

By William Blum

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The Southeast Asian country of Laos in the late 1950s and early 60s was a complex and confusing patchwork of civil conflicts, changes of government and switching loyalties. The CIA and the State Department alone could take credit for engineering coups at least once in each of the years 1958, 1959 and 1960. No study of Laos of this period appears to have had notable success in untangling the muddle of who exactly replaced whom, and when, and how, and why. After returning from Laos in 1961, American writer Norman Cousins stated that "if you want to get a sense of the universe unraveling, come to Laos. Complexity such as this has to be respected." ¹

Syria 2012 has produced its own tangled complexity. In the past 18 months it appears that at one time or another virtually every nation in the Middle East and North Africa as well as members of NATO and the European Union has been reported as aiding those seeking to overthrow the regime of Bashar al-Assad, while Russia, China, and several other countries are reported as aiding Assad. The Syrian leader, for his part, has consistently referred to those in combat against him as "terrorists", citing the repeated use of car bombs and suicide bombers. The West has treated this accusation with scorn, or has simply ignored it. But the evidence that Assad has had good reason for his stance has been accumulating for some time now, particularly of late. Here is a small sample from recent months:

- "It is the sort of image that has become a staple of the Syrian revolution, a video of masked men calling themselves the Free Syrian Army and brandishing AK-47s — with one unsettling difference. In the background hang two flags of Al Qaeda, white Arabic writing on a black field ... The video, posted on YouTube, is one more bit of evidence that Al Qaeda and other Islamic extremists are doing their best to hijack the Syrian revolution." (*New York Times*, July 24, 2012)

- A leading German newspaper reported that the German intelligence service, BND, had concluded that 95% of the Syrian rebels come from abroad and are likely to be members of al Qaeda. (*Die Welt*, September 30, 2012)

- "A network of French Islamists behind a grenade attack on a kosher market outside Paris last month also planned to join jihadists fighting in Syria ... Two suspects were responsible for recruiting and dispatching people 'to carry out jihad in some countries — notably Syria'," a state

prosecutor said. (*Associated Press*, October 11, 2012)

- "Fighters from a shadowy militant group [Jabhat al-Nusra] with suspected links to al-Qaida joined Syrian rebels in seizing a government missile defense base in northern Syria on Friday, according to activists and amateur video. ...The videos show dozens of fighters inside the base near a radar tower, along with rows of large missiles, some on the backs of trucks." (*Associated Press*, October 12, 2012)

- "In a videotape posted this week on militant forums, the Egyptian-born jihadist Ayman al-Zawahiri ... urged support for Syria's uprisings." (*Associated Press*, October 28, 2012)

According to your favorite news source or commentator, President Assad is either a brutal murderer of his own people, amongst whom he has had very little support; or he's a hero who's long had the backing of the majority of the Syrian population and who is standing up to Western imperialists and their terrorist comrades-in-arms, whom the US is providing military aid, intelligence, and propaganda services.

Washington and its freedom fighters *de jour* would like to establish Libya II. And we all know how well Libya I has turned out.

1. William Blum, *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II*, chapter 21