

## Déjà vu: Arming Present Day Friends

During the past 35 years the U.S. has armed “freedom fighters” in Nicaragua, revolutionaries in Angola, and other international military forces the State Department believed would advance both U.S. interests and the interests of our allies. The reasons given for providing such military aid and weaponry often include “liberating” a nation’s citizens from “oppressive regimes” or to “repel invaders” from sovereign territories. These actions, at times, have benefitted U.S. interests and at other times have not. In some cases, the Department of Defense has discovered that billions of dollars in U.S. aid and weapons were later used against our own U.S. military forces, once mutually advantageous alliances had disintegrated.

For example, during the 1980s, the United States armed the Mujahideen in Afghanistan to fight Soviet invaders. Convinced that the Soviet Union was running out of oil and had their eyes on OPEC’s middle-eastern oil fields, “... the CIA began one of its longest and most expensive covert operations, supplying billions of dollars in arms to Afghan guerrillas fighting the Soviets.” The arms shipments included hundreds of “stinger missiles” that were used with “deadly accuracy against Soviet helicopters” and “among the rebel recipients of U.S. arms [was] Osama bin Laden.”<sup>1</sup> In Iraq, the Reagan and Bush administrations supplied the government of Saddam Hussein with billions of dollars in aid and equipment during its nine-year war with Iran.<sup>2</sup> Just three short years later U.S. forces reported encountering U.S. weapons systems and equipment during the Gulf War and Operation Desert Storm.

Again in 2012, U.S.-approved weapon systems likely ended up in the wrong hands when the U.S. helped Libyan rebels oust Colonel Muammar el-Qaddafi from power. According to a December 5, 2012 *New York Times* report, the U.S. relied on our allies in Qatar to provide the hardware: “The Obama administration secretly gave its blessing to arms shipments to Libyan rebels from Qatar last year, but American officials later grew alarmed as evidence grew that Qatar was [also] turning some of the weapons over to Islamic militants.”<sup>3</sup>

In 2013, the State Department is considering arming Syrian rebels fighting the regime of President Bashar al-Assad. According to a July 12, 2013 *Reuters* report, “Republicans and Democrats on the House and Senate Intelligence Committees have expressed worries that the arms could end up in the hands of Islamist militants in Syria like the Nusra Front,” but may still go forward with the plans. According to the *Reuters* report, House Intelligence Committee Chairman Mike Rogers indicated “strong reservations” but believes “the committees were persuaded and we will be able to move forward.” Supporters of the plan hope that deliveries of U.S. provided arms will begin before 2014.<sup>4</sup>

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Is it ethical to arm rebels and revolutionaries in countries we are not at war with?
2. What criteria should be used to determine if a rebel or revolutionary faction receives U.S. military aid and/or financing? What organization, person, or persons should have the authority to make that decision?

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,450997-92,00.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/washingtonpost/access/74038683.html?dids=74038683&FMT=ABS&FMTS=ABS:FT&fmac=&date=lul+22%2C+1992&author=R.+Jeffrey+Smith&desc=Dozens+of+U.S.+Items+Used+in+Iraq+Arms>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/06/world/africa/weapons-sent-to-libyan-rebels-with-us-approval-fell-into-islamist-hands.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/06/world/africa/weapons-sent-to-libyan-rebels-with-us-approval-fell-into-islamist-hands.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/07/23/us-usa-syria-arms-idUSBRE96L0W520130723>