

Are We Saving Syrian 'Heroes'... or Just Importing More Fanatics with Links to Al Qaeda?

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*You may recall the fuss **Theresa May** made about getting rid of the Islamist preacher Abu Qatada.*

In the end it took 11 years of legal wrangling to get this fanatic, with his very nasty opinions, out of the country.

Without her personal intervention at the end, he would probably still be here.

Why, then, is the British Government seriously considering welcoming into this country an unknown number of men who have been – I put this at its mildest – closely associated for several years with an armed faction linked to Al Qaeda, or with others perhaps even worse?

Was all the fuss about Abu Qatada just a public relations front? Or does the right hand just not know what the left hand is doing?

Here's what is going on. Last week the new Foreign Secretary, **Jeremy Hunt**, put his name to a very odd statement about a very odd event.

I think the nicest thing to say here is that Mr Hunt is a bit inexperienced. The statement said that Britain would be 'protecting' a group of 'White Helmets', supposedly civil defence workers from Syria. That's what they call themselves, anyway.

The 400 people involved (a quarter of them said to be 'White Helmets') had been caught by the sudden collapse of Islamist jihadi rebel forces in a southern corner of Syria next to the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights.

And, despite the defeated rebels being Islamist jihadi fanatics, they were mysteriously allowed to cross into Israel so that they could escape to Jordan.

Israel? Such people normally regard Israel with violent hatred, a feeling Israel returns with interest.

As far as I can discover, other defeated groups of Syrian rebels and their hangers-on have been bussed under safe conducts to the rebel-held north of Syria, under Turkish and Russian supervision. Why not this time?

Later, the Jordanian government revealed that some of them would now be resettled in Britain. Its spokesman announced that Britain, Germany and Canada made a 'legally binding undertaking' to resettle them 'within a specified period of time' due to 'a risk to their lives'. Legally binding, eh?

What was this risk? What were they so worried about? Why do they need to come to Britain when the whole Arab Muslim world must presumably long to welcome these glorious, self-sacrificing heroes?

For, according to the Foreign Office, and many others, the 'White Helmets' are the good guys.

They like them so much they have so far spent £38.4million of your money and mine on supporting them.

The FO is in a mess over this. It has for years been backing the Islamist rebels against the Syrian government, a policy which involves supporting exactly the sort of people we would arrest if we found them in Birmingham.

Perhaps that is why it claims the 'White Helmets' are 'volunteers' (they are often paid) and that they have 'saved over 115,000 lives during the Syrian conflict' and done 'brave and selfless work' to 'save Syrians on all sides of the conflict.'

When I asked them to provide independent, checkable evidence for these assertions, they came up empty after three days of searching.

This is not surprising, as the 'White Helmets' generally operate only in areas controlled by unlovely bodies such as the Al-Nusra Front, until recently an affiliate of Al Qaeda, and the equally charming Jaish al-Islam (Army of Islam), famous for putting captured Syrian Army soldiers in cages and using them as human shields.

Independent Western observers, whether they are diplomats or journalists, can't really go to these zones, because they are quite likely to end up very dead and probably headless.

So you can choose whether to believe the 'White Helmets' and their flattering picture of their own goodness, or wonder why exactly they are in such need of protection that these much-feted and saintly humanitarians are willing to be evacuated through a country that most Arab Muslims loathe and despise, rather than rely on the mercy of their own countrymen.

Is it possible (I only ask) that, while undoubtedly brilliant at public relations, and at making slick videos showing themselves rescuing wounded children, the 'White Helmets' are not quite as nice as they say they are?

Even the USA, which has for years (like us) helped the Syrian rebels, refused entry to the leader of the 'White Helmets', Raed Saleh, when he arrived at Washington's Dulles Airport in 2016. They won't say why.

The FO tells me that the Home Office, not them, will be vetting those chosen to come here. I hope they are careful when they do so. I am sure that future Home Secretaries will not be grateful if any of the new arrivals turns out to have the same opinions as Abu Qatada.

In any case, it is time the British Government came clean about who it has been helping in Syria.

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