

# Convicted Criminals Serve as ISIS “Freedom Fighters” in Syria: Saudi, Pakistani and Iraqi Prison Inmates Replenish Al Qaeda Ranks

By [Prof Michel Chossudovsky](#)

Global Research, November 17, 2015  
16 February 2014

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

In-depth Report: [SYRIA](#)

*This article was first published on February 16, 2014. In early 2014, ISIS fighters were heralded by Washington as “Freedom Fighters”. A few months later, Obama launches his crusade against the Islamic state fighters who had been trained and financed by US-NATO and its Persian Gulf allies.*

*Several hundred convicted criminals who escaped from carefully guarded prisons in Iraq have recently joined the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) as well as the Al Qaeda affiliated rebel force, Jabhat Al Nusra.*

According to the NYT: “the prison breaks also reflect **the surging demand for experienced fighters** which led to a concerted effort by militant groups, particularly the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS, to seek them in the one place where they were held en masse — Iraq’s prison cells.” (Tim Arango and Eric Schmitt, [Escaped Inmates From Iraq Fuel Syrian Insurgency](#), NYT, February 12, 2014):

“American officials estimate, a few hundred of the escapees have joined the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, several in senior leadership roles.”

Acknowledged by the NYT, the prison breakouts are part of the recruitment of jihadists to serve in the Syrian insurgency. What is not mentioned, however, is that the recruitment of mercenaries is coordinated by NATO, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar with the support of the Obama administration. Moreover, known and documented, most Al Qaeda affiliated forces are covertly supported by Western intelligence including the CIA, Mossad and Britain’s MI6.

The prison breaks in Iraq are part of a coordinated endeavor entitled “Operation Breaking the Walls,” established in July 2012 by the ISIS. Acknowledged by an American counterterrorism official quoted by the NYT,

“The influx of these terrorists, who collectively have decades of battlefield experience, probably has strengthened the group and deepened its leadership bench.”

US Occupation forces and military personnel in the prisons turned a blind eye to the breakouts.

Abu Aisha was originally arrested by the Americans and then released from Camp Bucca, the infamous American prison in southern Iraq, in 2008. He was rearrested by the Iraqis in 2010.

“Finally, they put me in Abu Ghraib, and I again met some of the leaders and fighters I knew, including princes from Al Qaeda — Iraqis, Arabs and other nationalities,” he said. “Most of them had been at Bucca as well.”

One night last summer, as Abu Aisha sat in his cell waiting, as he did each day, for his date with the executioner, explosions and gunfire erupted and **a familiar prison guard opened the doors to his cell and told him to leave immediately. With hundreds of others**, Abu Aisha ran through the prison’s corridors until he escaped through a hole that had been blasted through a wall. He hopped into a waiting Kia truck that took him to freedom — and back to the battlefield.

Abu Aisha said **leaders of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria gave him a choice: leave and fight with them in Syria, or stay and fight in Iraq.** (NYT, op cit, emphasis added)



Prison guards secure the main gate of the newly named Baghdad Central Prison in Baghdad’s Abu Ghraib February 21, 2009.

Credit: Reuters/Mohammed Ameen

### **Coordinated Program: Saudi Arabia**

The recent prison breakouts have the hallmarks of a carefully planned covert operation requiring the complicity of the US military and Iraqi prison personnel.

The prison breakouts are not limited to Iraq. Planned prison escapes to join the jihadist insurgency have occurred simultaneously in several countries, indicating the existence of a coordinated recruitment program.

Saudi Arabia -which has played a central role in channeling weapons (including anti-aircraft missiles) to the jihadists on behalf of Washington- has been actively involved in the recruitment of mercenaries from the kingdom’s prisons.

In Saudi Arabia, however, there were no breakouts: criminals serving jail sentences were released from the kingdom’s prisons on condition they join the Syrian jihad.

A top secret memo sent by the Ministry of Interior in Saudi Arabia “reveals the Saudi Kingdom **sent death-row inmates, sentenced to execution by decapitation, to Syria to fight Jihad against the Syrian government in exchange for commuting their sentences.**”

[According to the April 17, 2012 memo](#), Saudi Arabia recruited some 1200 inmates, “offering them a full pardon and a monthly salary for their families, who were to remain in the Kingdom, in exchange for “...training for the sake of sending to the Jihad in Syria.”

Among those released from prison and recruited in Saudi Arabia were inmates from Yemen,

Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Jordan, Somalia, Afghanistan, Egypt, Pakistan, Iraq, and Kuwait.

### **From “Convicted Criminal” to “Freedom Fighter”**

The Western military alliance is not only supporting and financing a terrorist insurgency, supplying it with advanced weapons systems, it is also complicit in the recruitment of convicted criminals.

What is at stake is the coordination of several consecutive stages involving **Prison escapes/releases, Recruitment** of Mercenaries, **the Training of “Freedom Fighters”** and the **Procurement and Delivery of Weapons** to the insurgency:

1. **Release and/or escape** of convicted criminals and fighters from prisons;
2. **Recruitment** of the released/escaped inmates into Syria rebel formations;
3. **Paramilitary training** of the released/escaped prisoners, where applicable, e.g. in Saudi and Qatari training programs including religious indoctrination;
4. Dispatching **the newly trained jihadist rebels** to the war theater. **The former prison inmates** are sent to Syria to join the insurgency. They are integrated as mercenaries into one of the Al Qaeda affiliated forces.
5. **The military equipping of the newly trained mercenaries** (e.g. Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar) and **the procurement and delivery of military hardware** to the insurgency on behalf of the US Administration which is funding the inflow of weapons.

### **The Insurgency’s Recruitment of Prison Inmates: Part of an Ongoing Process**

Prison breaks occurred in Summer 2013 in Libya and Pakistan and Iraq in what appeared to be a carefully coordinated program. Those reported by the NYT are a continuation of an earlier project of prison breakouts.

**On July 23, 2013**, Abu Ghraib and Taji prisons were broken into in a carefully waged operation, leading to the escape of 500-1000 inmates, most of whom were recruited into the ranks of ISIS:

The attacks were allegedly carried out after months of preparations on behalf of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, which is a merger between Al-Qaeda’s affiliates in Syria and Iraq.

Between 500 to 1,000 prisoners have escaped as a result of the attack, “most of them were convicted senior members of Al-Qaeda and had received death sentences,” said Hakim Zamili, a senior member of the security and defense committee in parliament.

Suicide bombers drove cars with explosives into the gates of the prison on the outskirts of Baghdad on Sunday night, while gunmen attacked guards with mortar fire as well as rocket propelled grenades. ([Russia Today](#), July 2013)

On Saturday, **July 26**, at a maximum security prison in Benghazi, Libya, an almost identical prison break to the one that happened in Iraq occurred:

There were riots within the prison, with fires set. Suddenly gunmen flocked

upon the prison and opened fire. **About 1,200 of Libya's most deadly inmates escaped.** Peregrino Brimah, [Obama's Syria Endgame: New Al Qaeda "Recruits" Dispatched to Syria](#), Global Research, September 4, 2013, emphasis added)

And midnight, **July 29-30:**

Taliban gunmen with rocket launchers and suicide bombers, wearing police uniforms attacked the largest jail in Dera Ismail Khan, in a northern Pakistani province, **releasing over 300 inmates.** They came well coordinated, with rocket-propelled grenades and freed top militants—some of the Taliban's most deadly men. They used loud speakers to announce the names of the men they needed. According to an official ([Reuters](#)), only 70 of the 200 guards on duty were at work that fateful night, **suggesting higher level security-government involvement.** (Ibid, emphasis added)

The original source of this article is Global Research  
Copyright © [Prof Michel Chossudovsky](#), Global Research, 2015

---

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Prof Michel Chossudovsky](#)

### About the author:

Michel Chossudovsky is an award-winning author, Professor of Economics (emeritus) at the University of Ottawa, Founder and Director of the Centre for Research on Globalization (CRG), Montreal, Editor of Global Research. He has undertaken field research in Latin America, Asia, the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa and the Pacific and has written extensively on the economies of developing countries with a focus on poverty and social inequality. He has also undertaken research in Health Economics (UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), UNFPA, CIDA, WHO, Government of Venezuela, John Hopkins International Journal of Health Services (1979, 1983) He is the author of 13 books including *The Globalization of Poverty and The New World Order* (2003), *America's "War on Terrorism"* (2005), *The Globalization of War, America's Long War against Humanity* (2015). He is a contributor to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. His writings have been published in more than twenty languages. In 2014, he was awarded the Gold Medal for Merit of the Republic

of Serbia for his writings on NATO's war of aggression against Yugoslavia. He can be reached at [crgeditor@yahoo.com](mailto:crgeditor@yahoo.com)

**Disclaimer:** The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)

[www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca) contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)