

## “First Responder” White Helmets Reemerge as Experts in Defusing Explosives in Syria’s Afrin

Defusing explosives and mines, as the White Helmets say they’ve done in Afrin, is normally performed by specialized military experts, not paramedic first-responders who have claimed – falsely – to have been trained by the Red Cross.

By [Whitney Webb](#)

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*Featured image: A member of the White Helmets works a skidsteer emblazoned with the White Helmets logo in the recently captured city of Afrin, Syria. (Source: The White Helmets/Twitter)*

*After [being banned](#) by the Kurds in 2015, the White Helmets – the controversial “humanitarian” group that exclusively accompanies particular Western and Turkish-backed terrorist groups – [have announced](#) their return to the city of Afrin. The move follows the city’s takeover by the Turkish military and Turkish-backed rebels linked to terrorist groups, such as the Free Syrian Army (FSA). The group had originally been banned from Afrin by the Kurds due to their association with extremist groups like FSA and others.*

That takeover, part of “[Operation Olive Branch](#),” was launched by Turkey in response to the U.S.’ plan to create a 30,000-man “border force” consisting of recruits from the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Turkey [was outraged](#) by the plan, as the SDF is largely Kurdish and has “[substantial ties](#)” to the People’s Protection Unit (YPG), an offshoot of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which has been engaged in armed conflicts with Turkey since 1984. Turkey has long considered the PKK and the YPG to be “terrorists.”

After two and a half years of prohibition, the [#SyrianCivilDefense](#) returned to work in the Syrian city of [#Afrin](#) to serve all Syrians. The [#PYD](#) and [#YPJ](#) closed the center and arrested the volunteers who were working there, to come back today and be with the residents. [pic.twitter.com/32OHmLBvzN](https://pic.twitter.com/32OHmLBvzN)

— The White Helmets (@SyriaCivilDef) [March 28, 2018](#)

Since Turkish forces and their proxies took over the city, in fighting that [some reports](#) say killed around 500 civilians, reports of ethnic cleansing have surfaced. Members of Turkish proxy forces, such as the FSA, [have threatened](#) to massacre Afrin’s majority Kurdish population unless they convert to the variant of far-right Wahhabi Islam shared by terror groups like Daesh (ISIS) and al-Qaeda. Such demands often precede the mass-murder of ethnic and religious minorities by foreign-funded terrorist groups operating in Syria.

However, the White Helmets, despite their often-touted “humanitarian” leanings, have failed to make any public comment on the killings. Such silence is unsurprising for those who have followed the White Helmets’ actions in Syria over the years, where they [have aided](#) terrorist groups in the execution of civilians and have used children – both dead and alive – [as props](#) for pro-intervention propaganda intended to benefit the groups’ bids to topple the Syrian government.

### **Do they even know how to apply a bandage?**

In addition, the organization’s documented lack of paramedic expertise has buoyed claims made by several journalists, such as independent journalist **Vanessa Beeley**, that the White Helmets [were trained by](#) British ex-mercenary **James Le Mesurier** as a “military group” also instructed in “publicity craft.”

[#WhiteHelmets](#) restored to [#Afrin](#) alongside Turkish backed terrorist factions, after Kurds had actually kicked WH out in December 2015. [pic.twitter.com/qgKvxRskXW](https://pic.twitter.com/qgKvxRskXW)

— vanessa beeley (@VanessaBeeley) [April 1, 2018](#)

Recent praise for the White Helmets in Afrin, coming [from Turkish state media](#), provides further evidence that the White Helmets are [a propaganda construct](#) and not a first-responder group. According to reports, the White Helmets – which were actually [founded](#) in Turkey — have been “defusing the numerous mines and explosives” found in and around the city. [One report](#) cites Ismail Nassan, a White Helmet member, who stated that “lots of mines have been planted [in Afrin]. We have defused most of them.” Defusing explosives and mines is normally performed by specialized military experts, not paramedic first-responders who have claimed – [falsely](#) – to have been trained by the Red Cross.

The White Helmets’ reappearance in Afrin, alongside groups that have called on video for the ethnic cleansing of Kurds in the city, is just the latest example illustrating how the organization is paraded around to provide logistical support for — and improve the public image abroad of — those groups that seek to wipe out Syria’s ethnic and religious diversity as well as its independence from the U.S. and its allies.

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**Whitney Webb** is a staff writer for MintPress News who has written for several news organizations in both English and Spanish; her stories have been featured on ZeroHedge, the Anti-Media, and 21st Century Wire among others. She currently lives in Southern Chile.

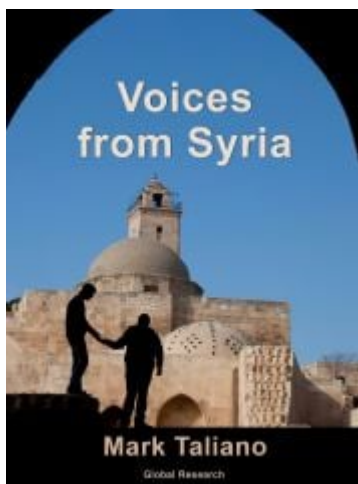
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