

How Did the Islamic State Capture Raqqa?

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While most of humanity [rejoices](#) the [liberation](#) of [Palmyra](#), some Western pundits [have trouble](#) deciding [which is worse](#), the Islamic State or 'Assad'. After the most hardcore of the West's warmongering press finally acknowledged that the Syrian 'regime' had 'recaptured' Palmyra, accusations started flying that everything was 'Assad's fault' as he originally lost the city to ISIL. Moon of Alabama [explains](#) why this narrative is false. A better question to ask might be, how the Iraqi government installed by the US occupiers lost Mosul to ISIL, while the last of the US occupying forces were still in the country? Either the US cannot take care and protect its client regimes, or (even worse) creation of the Islamic State was in US interests and plans all along.

But how did the Islamic State capture its capital, Raqqa? It did not. Raqqa was captured in March 2013 by Syrian rebels, i.e. "FSA" and their al-Nusra Front allies. Most likely the operation happened like the capture of Idlib in March 2015, under the command of a US operations room in Turkey and with full access to real time American satellite imagery. The Wikipedia article on the battle has more details:

[Battle of Raqqa - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)

The battle, on the opposition side, was primarily led by the Islamist jihadist group Al-Nusra Front. Ar-Raqqah was **not initially a rebel stronghold**. The city itself saw several small protests at the beginning of the uprising, but these soon subsided. The anti-Assad elements within the city also remained peaceful until the end of 2012.

Furthermore, previous pro-government tribal coalitions and the presence of more than a half million displaced Syrians, mostly from Idlib, Deir ez-Zor and Aleppo, served to strengthen the Syrian government's opinion that Ar-Raqqah was relatively safe. By early 2013, the Syrian opposition had secured much of the **north of Syria**, but had yet to seize control of a major city. The rebels planned an offensive to seize control of Ar-Raqqah where government forces were in control, effectively giving the opposition control over a much greater portion of northern Syria.



As of 2016 the Kurds control the north of Syria, after having driven out the Islamic State. Raqqa was never a rebel stronghold. Where then did all the FSA and Nusra fighters come from that captured Raqqa? It is evident that they mostly came across the border from Turkey, pushing their way through Kurdish controlled areas.

An example is the assault on Ras Al-Ayn detailed in [this long article](#) on *A Closer Look On Syria*. The border town of Ras Al-Ayn, northeast of Raqqa was attacked in late 2012 and early 2013 by FSA and Nusra fighters coming from Turkey. A brief summary of the events is included in this February 1st, 2013 [letter](#) from the Syrian Kurds in the UK on behalf of the Kurdish National Council to British Foreign Minister William Hague.

Dear Mr William Hague,

We, the representatives of the People's Council of Western Kurdistan and the Kurdish National Council in the UK, would like to draw your attention to the recent attack on civilians in Sere Kaniye (Ras al Ain).

Armed Selifist groups entered the region from Turkey supported and facilitated by the Turkish military and regional powers with the aim of destabilising the relatively peaceful region and dragging it into a violent sectarian war. Since the second attack began on 16 January 2013 armed mercenaries have been using heavy weapons to shell the city killing civilians indiscriminately, many civilian Kurds have been taken as hostages and their houses and properties have been destroyed or looted.

Thousands of vulnerable women and children have become displaced through fleeing from the horror. Since July 2012 the Syrian Kurds have been managing and governing themselves and their region democratically and peacefully. They actively contribute in building a democratic, plural and united Syria where all Syrians can enjoy living together freely and thus regional stability, democracy and peaceful co-existence. We earnestly call on the UK government and its Foreign Ministry to put pressure on the NATO allied Turkish government to end its foreign intervention by supporting those terrorist affiliated groups that are destabilising the Syrian Kurdish region.

We also ask that the UK's Foreign Minister to persuade the Syrian opposition to end supporting those armed groups and demand their withdrawal from the peaceful Kurdish region and so respect the legitimate Kurdish national rights. Thank you for your kind attention and we look forward to your assessment.

Yours Sincerely,

Representatives of: Kurdish National Council, People's Council of western Kurdistan in the UK.

Also, the Vatican News Agency Fides reports in November 2012:

[A young Christian of the opposition: "Minorities crushed in the conflict"](#)

In the middle of the night, at two on 8 November, residents of Ras al-Ain were awakened by the sound of explosions, of helicopters and machine guns. They were the fighters of the Free Army and Turkish helicopters reached Syrian territory and easily conquered the border crossing and the city.

The military began to seize civilian homes to use them as fighting positions. My grandfather's home was among those that were seized, where there were women, children and paralyzed grandmother. All Civilians were Expelled from their homes in pajamas, without being able to take documents, money or anything else. Military and combatants went further: with a 'black list', they went from one house to another looking for their enemies.

[...] In Ras al-Ain, the victims were not only Christians, but Christians were the only ones who were immediately expelled from their homes, carrying babies in their arms, put to flight the streets strewn with corpses. [...] Kurds, Arabs and Christians, more than 70.000 people fled, mostly to Hassake. Within hours, the city became a ghost town. The Alawites had the worst destiny: killed because Alawites. [...] We have always accused the regime of these disasters. Now we talk about the crimes that we have seen with our eyes, perpetrated by the Free Syrian Army."



ISIL beheading an al-Qaeda leader in Raqqa in June 2015 ([source](#))

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