

How ISIS Leader was Betrayed by Rivals and Killed by US?

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Following the killing of al-Baghdadi’s shadowy successor at Syria’s border along Turkey in a US Delta Force night raid on February 3 on a tipoff from the Turkish intelligence, although the mainstream media is alleging the ISIS leader was killed in a non-descript three-story house on the outskirts of Atmeh, a densely populated town in Syria’s northwest Idlib province straddling the border with Turkey, and the building and the impoverished locality were purportedly inhabited by “civilian refugees” displaced by the decade-long conflict, the fortified neighborhood was in fact an al-Nusra Front redoubt populated by militants and their families providing much-needed security to the slain ISIS caliph.

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), led by al-Nusra Front Emir **Abu Muhammad al-Jolani**, controls most of the territory in Syria’s northwestern Idlib province with the tacit approval of Turkish security forces that have established numerous military outpost in the Syrian enclave bordering Turkey.

As with the May 2011 Navy Seals raid at a fortified compound in the garrison town of Pakistan that eliminated al-Qaeda leader **Osama bin Laden** and his courier, the three-story building on the outskirts of Atmeh, “a stone’s throw away” from the Turkish border, too, was occupied by the slain ISIS leader, his courier, who also acted as a trusted bodyguard, and their families.

The courier, variously described as a mechanic or a truck driver, occupied the ground portion of the building along with his family and frequently ventured out of the house on a motorbike and fixed neighbors’ cars as pastime, according to a [Guardian report](#) [1], whereas the ISIS leader occupying the top floor of the building with his family seldom came out of the house.

The courier had allegedly rented the house for \$130 about eleven months ago, according to a [New York Times report](#) [2], though a more plausible scenario is that the Islamic State must have paid a large amount of protection money to al-Nusra leadership for hosting in its territory both the slain caliphs of the Islamic State, al-Baghdadi and al-Qurayshi, who were

killed in October 2019 and February 3 raids, respectively.

All the adjoining houses in the neighborhood were reportedly occupied by al-Nusra Front militants and their families, with an al-Nusra Front checkpoint only 200 meters away, a Turkish police station 500 meters and a Turkish military outpost a kilometer away from the building, according to [credible sources](#) [3] with inside information of Syria's Idlib.

The militants were given forewarning of the imminent raid and were strictly ordered not to fire upon the US forces by the al-Nusra leadership and the Turkish intelligence. Still, the trigger-happy Delta Force commandos shot down two militants while evacuating and also blew up a helicopter that encountered malfunction.

Most of the alleged "civilian casualties" that occurred during the raid, as reported by Syria's dubious "humanitarian organization" the White Helmets, were of militants and their families belonging to the Islamic State who remained loyal to the slain caliph instead of the collaborators belonging to the al-Nusra Front.

In fact, some of the casualties took place in a firefight between the two terrorist outfits that immediately ensued following the raid after the al-Nusra militants stabbed the ISIS caliph in the back for \$10 million bounty. The shootout on the ground was the reason why the evacuating US forces had to open fire on the militants down below, assuming their choppers were being targeted.

As in the February 3 Delta Force raid eliminating al-Baghdadi's successor al-Qurayshi, it's important to note in the news coverage of the killing of al-Baghdadi in October 2019 that although the mainstream media was trumpeting for several years before the raid that the Islamic State's fugitive chief was hiding somewhere on the Iraq-Syria border in the east, he was found hiding in northwest Idlib province, under the control of Turkish militant proxies and al-Nusra Front, and was killed at Barisha village, just five kilometers from the Turkish border.

According to the "official version" of Washington's story regarding the dramatic killing of al-Baghdadi in the October 2019 raid, the choppers took off from an American airbase in Erbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan, flew hundreds of miles over the enemy territory in the airspace controlled by the Syrian and Russian air forces, killed the self-proclaimed "caliph" of the Islamic State in a Hollywood-style special-ops raid, and took the same route back to Erbil along with the dead body of the terrorist and his belongings.

Although Washington had conducted several airstrikes in Syria's Idlib in the past, those were carried out by fixed-wing aircraft that fly at high altitudes, and the aircraft took off from the American airbases in Turkey, which were just across the border from Syria's northwestern Idlib province. Why would Washington risk flying troops at low altitudes in helicopters over hostile territory controlled by myriads of Syria's heavily armed militant outfits?

In fact, several Turkish journalists, including Rajip Soylu, the Turkey correspondent for the Middle East Eye, live-tweeted on the night of the special-ops raid that the choppers took off from the American airbase in Turkey's Incirlik.

It's pertinent to note that in October 2019, the Trump administration promised to comply with Turkish President Erdogan's longstanding demand to evacuate the American forces from the Kurdish-held areas in northeast Syria in October 2019.

Immediately following the announcement of the withdrawal of the US forces from northeast Syria by the Trump administration on October 6, Turkey mounted Operation Peace Spring on October 9 in which the Turkish armed forces and allied Syrian militant proxies invaded and occupied 120 kilometers wide and 32 kilometers deep stretch of Syrian territory between the northeastern towns of Tal Abyad and Ras al-Ayn, creating a “buffer zone” between the Turkish border and the territory held by the Syrian YPG Kurds in northeast Syria, which Turkey has designated as “terrorists.”

In return, Trump got a coveted feather in his diplomatic cap, as Turkey let US Special Forces kill fugitive leader of the Islamic State Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi on October 26, weeks after the Turkish Operation Peace Spring in northeast Syria on October 9.

Clearly, both the self-styled caliphs of ISIS, al-Baghdadi and his successor al-Qurayshi, were hiding in Syria’s Idlib with the blessings of al-Nusra leadership and the Turkish security forces, which have trained and armed myriad groups of jihadists during Syria’s decade-long proxy war, and were used as bargaining chips to extract geo-strategic concessions from Washington.

The scapegoating of both the ISIS caliphs by the Erdogan government, first in October 2019 to let Turkey mount Operation Peace Spring in northeast Syria and then on February 3, was done to reconcile with the Biden administration as Erdogan was repeatedly snubbed by Biden throughout his maiden year as president due to Erdogan’s personal friendship and business partnership with Biden’s political rival Trump.

During the four years of the Trump presidency, Erdogan acted with impunity in regional conflicts, from Syria and Libya to Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan, because he had forged a personal bonhomie with Donald Trump, as Trump’s son-in-law Jared Kushner was a business partner of Erdogan’s son-in-law and former finance minister of Turkey Berat Albayrak, who was summarily dismissed from the ministry as soon as Trump lost the US presidential election in November 2020.

Biden tightened the screws not only on Erdogan but also on Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman after being elected president, and now both the Middle Eastern “strongmen” are bending over backwards to reconcile with the Biden administration to regain their lost international prestige.

Offering the traditional Turkish cuisine, the ISIS caliph, on a platter to powerful guests is Erdogan’s customary way of fawning over patrons in the White House, as is obvious from the killing of al-Baghdadi in October 2019 and the elimination of his successor in the February 3 raid.

Regarding the nexus between the militants of the Islamic State and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the jihadist group controlling Syria’s Idlib, it’s noteworthy that Abu Mohammad al-Jolani, the leader of al-Nusra Front, has emerged as the most influential militant leader in Syria’s decade-long proxy war after the killing of Islamic State chief Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in a US Special Ops raid two years ago. In fact, since the beginning of the Syrian conflict in August 2011 to April 2013, the Islamic State and al-Nusra Front used to be a single jihadist organization that chose the title Jabhat al-Nusra.

Although the current al-Nusra Front has been led by Abu Mohammad al-Jolani, he was [appointed](#)[4] the emir of al-Nusra Front by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the slain caliph of the

Islamic State, in January 2012. Thus, al-Jolani's Nusra Front is only a splinter group of the Islamic State, which split from its parent organization in April 2013 over a leadership dispute between the two organizations.

In August 2011, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who was based in Iraq, began sending Syrian and Iraqi jihadists experienced in guerrilla warfare across the border into Syria to establish an organization inside the country. Led by a Syrian militant known as Abu Mohammad al-Jolani, the group began recruiting fighters and establishing militant cells throughout the country. On 23 January 2012, the group announced its formation as Jabhat al-Nusra.

In April 2013, **Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi** released an audio statement in which he announced that al-Nusra Front had been established, financed and supported by the Islamic State of Iraq. Al-Baghdadi declared that the two groups were merging under the name the "Islamic State of Iraq and Syria" (ISIS). The leader of al-Nusra Front, Abu Muhammad al-Jolani, issued a statement denying the merger and complaining that neither he nor anyone else in al-Nusra's leadership had been consulted about the arbitrary decision.

Al-Qaeda Central's leader and the successor of Osama bin Laden, **Ayman al Zawahiri**, tried to mediate the dispute between al-Baghdadi and al-Jolani but eventually, in October 2013, he endorsed al-Nusra Front as the official franchise of al-Qaeda Central in Syria. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, however, defied the nominal authority of al-Qaeda Central and declared himself the caliph of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.

Bearing this background in mind, it becomes abundantly clear that a single militant organization operated in Syria and Iraq under the leadership of al-Baghdadi until April 2013, which chose the banner of al-Nusra Front, and that the current emir of the breakaway faction of al-Nusra Front, al-Jolani, was actually al-Baghdadi's deputy in Syria.

Thus, the Islamic State operated in Syria since August 2011 under the designation of al-Nusra Front and it subsequently changed its name to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in April 2013, after which it overran Raqqa and parts of Deir al-Zor in Syria in the summer of 2013. In January 2014, it overran Fallujah and parts of Ramadi in Iraq and reached the zenith of its power after it captured Mosul in June 2014.

After the dismantling of the Islamic State "caliphate" in 2019 with the remnants of militants being on the run and the rest having already joined the ranks of al-Nusra Front, it's about time al-Jolani, the wily lieutenant of al-Baghdadi who hosted both the slain "caliphs" of the Islamic State in his territory in Syria's Idlib to return the favor until they were both betrayed and killed in the US Special Ops raids, to do away with pretenses and declare himself the caliph of the Islamic State, instead of letting another obscure jihadist, like undistinguished al-Qurayshi, assume the "venerated" jihadist title.

But Abu Mohammad al-Jolani is a cunning operator skilled in realpolitik, public relations and Machiavellian intrigues who would never shoot himself in the foot. In a May 2015 [interview](#) [5] with Qatar's state television al-Jazeera, Abu Mohammad al-Jolani took a public pledge at the behest of his Turkish and Gulf-based patrons that his organization simply had regional ambitions limited to fighting the Syrian government and had no intention, whatsoever, of mounting terror attacks in the Western countries.

That's the only salient distinction assuring the safety of his militant network in Syria's northwestern enclave and guaranteeing continued financial and military support from

Turkey, the Gulf States and the Western powers to the violent jihadist organization that has the blood of as many Syrians on its hands during the decade-long conflict as the Islamic State.

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Notes

[1] 'We are still shocked': the Syrians who discovered Islamic State's leader was their neighbor: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/04/we-are-still-shocked-the-syrians-who-discovered-islamic-states-leader-was-their-neighbour>

[2] 'Those Who Remain Will Die': Neighbors Recall Night of Fear in Syria Raid: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/03/world/middleeast/isis-raid-idlib-qurayshi.html>

[3] Slain ISIS Terror Leader Resided In Turkish Occupation Area Of Syria: <https://www.zerohedge.com/geopolitical/us-commandos-take-out-top-isis-leader-daring-raid-syria-s-idlib>

[4] Al-Jolani was appointed as the emir of al-Nusra Front by al-Baghdadi: <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/16689>

[5] Al-Jolani's interview to Al-Jazeera: "Our mission is to defeat the Syrian government": <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/05/nusra-front-golani-assad-syria-hezbollah-isis-150528044857528.html>

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