

Israel's Alliance with al-Qaeda

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[Since January](#), I have been ploughing a lonely furrow in this column by covering what is certainly one of the most under-reported stories in the world right now: Israeli involvement in the war in Syria.

Almost unnoticed by the mainstream media, Israel's occupation forces in the Golan Heights have been in alliance with the Nusra Front, al-Qaeda's official franchise in Syria. This alliance certainly includes logistical support and may even extend as far as arming al-Qaeda rebels in south-western Syria.

[In January, I showed](#) how the reports of UN peacekeepers in the Golan had talked of regular contacts between rebel forces in that Israeli-occupied sector of Syria. They also observed, according to [a June report](#), Israeli soldiers "handing over two boxes to armed members of the opposition" from the Israeli-occupied side to the Syrian-controlled side.

According to further reports by UN peacekeepers, such interactions continued after Quneitra (a town containing a key checkpoint between the Israeli-occupied and Syrian-controlled sectors of the Golan) was overrun by the Nusra Front.

[In March, I wrote](#) on how an Israeli army spokesperson had now confirmed these reports. He clarified that this extended to logistical support in the form of medical aid to al-Qaeda rebels. "We don't ask who they are, we don't do any screening," the unnamed Israeli military official told the *Wall Street Journal*. "Once the treatment is done, we take them back to the border [sic - ceasefire line] and they go on their way [in Syria]," he said.

For several years now there have been propaganda reports in the Israeli press about how Israel is supposedly playing a purely "humanitarian" role in the Syrian war, by treating civilians and sending them back. But this has now been exposed as propaganda. If that were really the case, Israel would be treating combatants from all sides in the Syrian war and furthermore it would arrest suspected al-Qaeda militants. But in reality, all reports confirm that the Israelis are treating only the "rebel" side, including the al-Qaeda militants that lead the armed opposition in that area of Syria (as indeed they do in much of the country). The key difference that disproves the propaganda line, and proves an active Israel-al-Qaeda alliance is that, after treatment, instead of arresting them, the al-Qaeda fighters are sent back to fight in Syria. There is no chance at all that, in the event that Israel captures injured Hamas, Hizballah or Iranian combatants alive, it would send them back to Gaza or Syria to "go on their way", as the unnamed Israeli official put it.

After all, Israeli forces in that area have, during the course of the war, made several air-strikes on what they claimed were Hizballah targets in Syria. If Israel were genuinely opposed to al-Qaeda, it would hit their positions too. But it seems that Israel prefers al-Qaeda over Hizballah and Iran.

[In April, I reported how](#) Israel had started to cover up its alliance with al-Qaeda. It seems that the propaganda line about their humanitarianism had not been bought by many, so they took measures to stop too much being revealed. Sedqi al-Maqet, a pro-government Syrian activist from the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, was arrested, with a military gag-order initially banning the Israeli press from reporting the case. Al-Maqet had used his residence in the Golan to report from his Facebook account in Arabic about contacts he said he had witnessed between Israeli armed forces and what he termed terrorists active in the Syrian-controlled sector of the Golan. One of these videos, aired on Syrian state TV, was used to charging him with “spying”.

Since those reports, there have been further confirmations of the Israeli-al-Qaeda alliance. The most oblique of these came from David Ignatius, the *Washington Post* associated editor and foreign affairs columnist. Earlier this month [he wrote that](#) “Jordan and Israel have developed secret contacts with members of the Jabhat al-Nusra group along their borders.”

The second new confirmation came from the Israeli press in the form of Ron Ben Yishai, an Israeli war reporter for *Yediot Ahronot*, a popular Israeli tabloid. The report, which included video (vetted by the Israeli military) of a hospitalised Syrian rebel (possibly an al-Qaeda militant) with a obscured face, mostly took the usual propaganda line, singing the praises of the wonderful morality of the glorious Israeli army.

[In the video](#), Lieutenant Colonel Dr. Itzik Malka claims of the 1,600 wounded he said have arrived in Israel from Syria, “the majority are women, children and elderly people” (my emphasis). That’s another implicit acknowledgement that Israel is treating wounded militants from Syria (the majority of whom in that area are al-Qaeda). And Ben Yishai himself in the article accompanying the footage states that “wounded Syrians have been arriving almost daily to the security fence, seeking medical help. It is likely that most if not all of these nationals are rebels from the rival jihadist Islamic State and al-Nusra Front groups”.

All this would be a massive scandal were an official “enemy” of the West, like Iran, or the Syrian government, credibly reported to have aided a terrorist group like al-Qaeda. We would have been bombarded with headlines about it, much like we are currently bombarded with headlines about the evils of the “Islamic State”.

But why has all this been pretty much ignored by the mainstream press? [Last month, I tried to draw some of the strands together](#), and suggest how this Israeli-al-Qaeda alliance fits into the wider fight in Syria and the region, especially the latest al-Qaeda offensive in Syria.

We can say with confidence that the mainstream press in the West supports Israel, and so does not find it convenient to report on this scandalous Israeli-al-Qaeda alliance in Syria. But it’s crucial to understand that this is part of a wider pattern in which the West’s alliances with (to say the least) morally-dubious regional actors are ignored, downplayed or actively disguised by the media.

[As I have argued previously](#), the US and the UK were in large part to blame for the rise of the forces that eventually became the “Islamic State”. They can be said to have created “Islamic State,” since the 2003 invasion of Iraq (and especially the very [consciously sectarian policy of divide and rule](#) that the occupation regime enforced there) created the swamp in which al-Qaeda in Iraq (which later became the “Islamic State in Iraq,” which in turn re-branded and became the “Islamic State of Iraq and Sham” when it expanded into

Syria and is now know as just the “Islamic State”) was born.

But, [reports the sterling investigative journalist Nafeez Ahmed](#), a newly-declassified Pentagon report has now proven that Western intelligence agencies were aware, as far back as August 2012, that “Islamic State” could arise and furthermore they even wanted it to happen.

The Defense Intelligence Agency report stated that “there is the possibility of establishing a declared or undeclared Salafist Principality in eastern Syria (Hasaka and Der Zor), and this is exactly what the supporting powers to the opposition want, in order to isolate the Syrian regime”. Today, the so-called Islamic State’s power base is in the east and north of Syria, and it controls most of the regions around Deir al-Zor, the regional capital of that eponymous eastern region. The city itself is still contested between regime and ISIS forces.

The report (revealed by an American conservative group’s freedom of information request) clarifies in a preceding paragraph that “supporting powers” is a reference to “Western countries, the Gulf states and Turkey”. The term “western countries” here is likely supposed to include Israel. In any event, such intelligence is likely to have been shared with Israel.

So with Israel aware that the West was engaged in such cynicism with al-Qaeda-type groups in Iraq and Syria, it’s no wonder Israel feels itself permitted to engage in an active alliance with al-Qaeda in Syria.

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Note: This article was amended at 17.29 BST on May 28, 2015 to make it clearer that Deir al-Zor city itself is still contested between regime forces and ISIS.

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