

# The Missing Pieces of the Al-Baghdadi Execution Puzzle

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*Casting aspersions over the death of **Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi**, Russia's seasoned **Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov** [claimed](#) [1] while speaking to Rossiya 24 broadcaster that the Islamic State and its slain "caliph" were the spawns of the United States. Being a skilled diplomat having intimate knowledge of happenings on the ground in Syria, his statement merits serious consideration.*

It's important to note in the news coverage about the killing of al-Baghdadi that although the mainstream media had been trumpeting for the last several years that the Islamic State's fugitive chief had been hiding somewhere on the Iraq-Syria border in the east, he was found hiding in the northwestern Idlib governorate, under the control of Turkey's militant proxies and al-Nusra Front, and was killed while trying to flee to Turkey in Barisha village five kilometers from the border.

The reason why the mainstream media scrupulously avoided mentioning Idlib as al-Baghdadi's most likely hideout in Syria was to cover up the collusion between the militant proxies of Turkey and the jihadists of al-Nusra Front and the Islamic State.

In fact, the corporate media takes the issue of Islamic jihadists "commingling" with Turkey-backed "moderate rebels" in Idlib so seriously - which could give the Syrian government the pretext to mount an offensive in northwest Syria - that the New York Times cooked up an [exclusive report](#) [2] a couple of days after the Special Ops night raid, on October 30, that the Islamic State paid money to al-Nusra Front for hosting al-Baghdadi in Idlib.

The morning after the night raid, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights [reported](#) [3] on Sunday, October 27, that a squadron of eight helicopters accompanied by warplanes belonging to the international coalition had attacked positions of Hurras al-Din, an al-Qaeda-affiliated group, in Idlib province where the Islamic State chief was believed to be hiding.

Despite detailing the operational minutiae of the Special Ops raid, the mainstream news coverage of the raid deliberately elided over the crucial piece of information that the compound in Barisha village five kilometers from Turkish border where al-Baghdadi was killed belonged to Hurras al-Din, an elusive terrorist outfit which had previously been targeted several times in the US airstrikes.

Although Hurras al-Din is generally assumed to be an al-Qaeda affiliate, it is in fact the regrouping of the Islamic State's jihadists under a different name in northwestern Idlib governorate after the latter terrorist organization was routed from Mosul and Anbar in Iraq

and Raqqa and Deir al-Zor in Syria and was hard pressed by the US-led coalition's airstrikes in eastern Syria.

Here, let me try to dispel a myth peddled by the corporate media and foreign policy think tanks that the Islamic State originated from al-Qaeda in Iraq. Many biased political commentators of the mainstream media deliberately try to muddle the reality in order to link the emergence of the Islamic State to the ill-conceived invasion of Iraq in 2003 by the Republican Bush administration.

Their motive behind this chicanery is to absolve the Obama administration's policy of nurturing the Syrian opposition against the Syrian government since the beginning of Syria's proxy war in 2011 until June 2014, when the Islamic State overran Mosul in Iraq and the Obama administration made a volte-face on its previous "regime change" policy of providing indiscriminate support to Syrian militants and declared a war against a faction of Syrian rebel groups, the Islamic State.

After linking the creation of the Islamic State to the Iraq invasion in 2003, interventionist hawks deviously draw the risible conclusion that the Obama administration's premature evacuation of American troops from Iraq in December 2011 gave birth to the Islamic State.

Moreover, such duplicitous spin-doctors misleadingly try to find the roots of the Islamic State in al-Qaeda in Iraq; however, the Anbar insurgency in Iraq was fully subdued after "The Iraq Surge" in 2007. Al-Qaeda in Iraq became a defunct organization after the death of Abu Musab al Zarqawi in June 2006 and the subsequent surge of troops in Iraq.

The re-eruption of insurgency in Iraq was the spillover effect of nurturing militants in Syria since 2011-onward, when the Islamic State overran Fallujah and parts of Ramadi in January 2014 and subsequently reached the zenith of its power after capturing Mosul in June 2014.

The borders between Syria and Iraq are highly porous and it's impossible to contain the flow of militants and arms between the two countries. The Obama administration's policy of providing funds, weapons and training to Syrian militants in training camps located at the border regions of Turkey and Jordan bordering Syria was bound to backfire sooner or later.

Notwithstanding, during the eight-year proxy war in Syria, Abu Mohammad al-Jolani, the chief of al-Nusra Front which currently goes by the name of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), emerged as one of the most influential militant leaders, second only to the Islamic State's slain "caliph" al-Baghdadi. In fact, since the beginning of Syria's proxy war in early 2011 to April 2013, the Islamic State and al-Nusra Front used to be a single organization that followed Saudi Arabia's Salafi ideology and chose the banner al-Nusra Front.

Although the current al-Nusra Front has been led by **Abu Mohammad al-Jolani**, he was [appointed](#)[4] as the emir of al-Nusra Front by Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, the leader of 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 early 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 known as Abu Mohammad al-Jolani, the group began to recruit fighters and establish cells throughout the country. On 23 January

2012, the group announced its formation as al-Nusra Front.

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. 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 Syria-based leadership had been consulted.

Al-Qaeda Central's leader, 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.

Keeping 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 subsequent breakaway faction of al-Nusra Front, al-Jolani, was actually al-Baghdadi's deputy in Syria.

Thus, the Islamic State operated in Syria since early 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 the summer of 2013. And in January 2014, it overran Fallujah and parts of Ramadi in Iraq and reached the zenith of its power when it captured Mosul in June 2014.

In conclusion, it would be misleading to fall for the ruse of finding the roots of the Islamic State in al-Qaeda in Iraq. Although the remnants of al-Qaeda in Iraq might have joined the ranks of Syria-bound militants in Iraq in 2011, the principal cause of the creation of the Islamic State, al-Nusra Front and myriads of other militant outfits in Syria and Iraq was the "regime change" policy pursued by the Obama administration from 2011 to 2014 to topple the government of Bashar al-Assad in Syria.

During the course of Syria's proxy war, [billions of dollars](#) [5] worth weapons and ammunition, including American-made antitank missiles, were provided to militants in training camps located in border regions of Turkey and Jordan, and possibly in Iraq too, by the Western powers and the Gulf states. It also bears mentioning that for the initial several months of Syria's proxy war, American troops were still deployed next door in Iraq, as the war in Syria began in early 2011 whereas the US forces evacuated from Iraq in December 2011.

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## Notes

[1] [Al-Baghdadi was US 'spawn', his death is still an open question - Lavrov](#)

[2] [ISIS Leader Paid Rival for Protection but Was Betrayed by His Own](#)

[3] [Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi killed in US raid](#)

[4] [Al-Jolani was appointed as the emir of al-Nusra Front by al-Baghdadi](#)

[5] [U.S. Relies Heavily on Saudi Money to Support Syrian Rebels](#)

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