

Saudi Arabia: Death-row Inmates sent to fight Assad in Syria

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by Eileen Kersey

Saudi Arabia is one country in the Middle East that is keen to see the Syrian crisis resolved. News that the Saudis sent death-row prisoners to fight Assad forces in Syria though cast more doubt over the rebels.

As John Kerry continues his whirlwind diplomatic tour of Europe, the Secretary of State left Paris earlier Sunday and is now in London. The mainstream media is full of tales and counter-tales of atrocities in Syria but just who are the rebels?

In January 2013 Business Insider published a report involving a leaked document. (1) It cited the Assyrian International News Agency, AINA, which claimed that a secret memo revealed prisoners on death-row in Saudi jails had been “recruited” to fight against Assad’s forces in Syria.

The prisoners had reportedly been offered a deal — stay and be executed or fight against Assad in Syria. As part of the deal the prisoners were offered a “pardon and a monthly stipend for their families, who were were allowed to stay in the Sunni Arab kingdom”.

Translated the memo according to Business Insider said:

A leaked internal memo shows how Saudi officials commuted 1,200 death row inmates under the condition they go and fight against Assad in Syria, according to the Assyrian International News Agency.

From the memo:

We have reached an agreement with them that they will be exempted from the death sentence and given a monthly salary to their families and loved ones, who will be prevented from traveling outside Saudi Arabia in return for rehabilitation of the accused and their training in order to send them to Jihad in Syria.

Saudi officials apparently gave them a choice: decapitation or jihad? In total, inmates from Yemen, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Jordan, Somalia, Afghanistan, Egypt, Pakistan, Iraq, and Kuwait chose to go and fight in Syria.

It involved around 1200 prisoners from countries including the Yemen, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Jordan, Somalia, Afghanistan, Egypt, Pakistan, Iraq, and Kuwait.

USA Today claimed that Russia were not happy with the Saudi prisoner program and vowed to bring it to the attention of the United Nations.

In Desert Storm in 1991 Saudis collaborated with Americans. Business Insider notes that such deals sometimes include militant Islamist groups.

Who are the Syrian rebels or opposition?

This week the NYTimes published a report which dated back to 2012 and purported to detail the brutality of the rebels:

“The Syrian rebels posed casually, standing over their prisoners with firearms pointed down at the shirtless and terrified men. The prisoners, seven in all, were captured Syrian soldiers. Five were trussed, their backs marked with red welts. They kept their faces pressed to the dirt as the rebels’ commander recited a bitter revolutionary verse. “For fifty years, they are companions to corruption,” he said. “We swear to the Lord of the Throne, that this is our oath: We will take revenge.” The moment the poem ended, the commander, known as “the Uncle,” fired a bullet into the back of the first prisoner’s head. His gunmen followed suit, promptly killing all the men at their feet “

Note

(1) www.businessinsider.com/saudi-arabia-sent-inmates-against-assad-2013-1

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