

BBC Uncovers Secret ISIS Deal

News:

The BBC has uncovered details of a secret deal that let hundreds of ISIS fighters and their families escape from Raqqa, under the direction of the US and British-led coalition and Kurdish-led forces who control the city. (http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/ids-sh/raqqas_dirty_secret) The fall of al-Raqqa has been presented as the final bastion of ISIS and the victory of the western coalition, but rumours have long persisted of western complicity with ISIS and this investigation by the BBC gives a revealing insight into western-ISIS relations.

Comment:

The BBC uncovered that lorry drivers were contracted by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), an alliance of Kurdish and Arab fighters opposed to ISIS to lead a convoy that would take hundreds of families displaced by fighting from the town of Tabqa on the Euphrates River to a camp further north. But when the drivers assembled their convoy early on 12 October, they realised they had been lied to. Instead, it would take three days of hard driving, carrying a deadly cargo - hundreds of ISIS fighters, their families and tonnes of weapons and ammunition.

The drivers were all interviewed by the BBC who were promised thousands of dollars for the task but it had to remain secret. The deal was to let ISIS fighters escape from Raqqa which had been arranged by local officials. It came after four months of fighting that left the city obliterated and almost devoid of people. The deal would enable many hundreds of ISIS fighters to escape from the city. Neither the US or British, nor the SDF, wanted to admit their part. Great pains were taken to hide it from the world. But the BBC has spoken to dozens of people who were either on the convoy, or observed it, and to the men who negotiated the deal.

Abu Fawzi, one of the lorry drivers explained: "We were scared from the moment we entered Raqqa," he said. "We were supposed to go in with the SDF, but we went alone. As soon as we entered, we saw ISIS fighters with their weapons and suicide belts on. They booby-trapped our trucks. If something were to go wrong in the deal, they would bomb the entire convoy. Even their children and women had suicide belts on." The SDF cleared Raqqa of media. The ISIS escape from its base would not be televised.

Footage secretly filmed and passed to the BBC shows lorries towing trailers crammed with armed men. Despite an agreement to take only personal weapons, IS fighters took everything they could carry. Ten trucks were loaded with weapons and ammunition. In light of the BBC investigation, the coalition now admits the part it played in the deal. Some 250 ISIS fighters were allowed to leave Raqqa, with 3,500 of their family members.

From the very first day ISIS emerged many have always questioned their motives, especially when ISIS targets overwhelmingly other Muslims, and not western coalition troops. In Syria emerged when Bashar al-Assad was on the verge of falling, ISIS moved into Syria and began fighting the rebel groups, which greatly aided al-Assad's position.

In Mosul we now know Iraqi troops were ordered by their superiors in Baghdad to leave the city and surrender the city to ISIS. ISIS freely move across the Iraqi-Syria border with western aircraft controlling the airspace, but they did little to destroy ISIS. The freeing of ISIS in Raqqa really points to their use still being needed.

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