

‘British-born jihadists fighting Assad in Syria’ - captured photographer

By [Global Research](#)

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Armed members of the Free Syrian Army are seen in the western border town of Zabadani in this undated still image taken from amateur video obtained by Reuters (Reuters / Reuters TV)

Radical Islamists with “British accents” are among the coalition forces looking to topple Bashar Assad, says Jeroen Oerlemans, a photographer who was held hostage in Syria for a week. The UK Foreign Office has launched an investigation.

Oerlemans, a famous Dutch photo journalist, and John Cantlie, another photographer from the UK, were captured by a group of between 30 and 100 anti-Assad fighters when crossing the Syrian border from Turkey last week. They were then blindfolded.

“One of the black jihadists freaked out and shouted: ‘These are journalists and now they will see we are preparing an international jihad in this place.’” Oerlemans told NRC Handelsblatt newspaper. He said that none of the fighters was Syrian.

“They all claimed they came from countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh and Chechnya and they said there was some vague ‘emir’ at the head of the group.”

About 40 per cent of the militants spoke English. In fact, several apparently talked with recognizable regional British accents, from Birmingham and London.

The two photographers suspected that a ransom would be demanded for their release and tried to escape. Oerlemans was shot twice in the leg during the failed attempt and Cantlie, who has so far not spoken to any media, was wounded in the arm.

The pair’s ordeal ended when the Free Syrian Army, the main anti-Assad force, demanded that their nominal allies hand them over.

“They took us with them like a bunch of gangsters,” Oerlemans said, *“Shooting in the air as we rode out of there.”*

The Free Syrian Army released the men and the two are now resting in Turkey. They expect to travel home in the coming days.

If it is confirmed, Oerleman’s story will add to reports that Syria has become a magnet for radical Islamists, who are there either as mercenaries or because of ideology.

“As soon as Assad has fallen, these fighters want to introduce Islamic law, Sharia, in Syria,” said Oerlemans.

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