

Idlib: Al Qaeda's Last Stand

By [Tony Cartalucci](#)

Global Research, September 08, 2018

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)
Theme: [Media Disinformation](#), [Military](#), [Military and WMD](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)
In-depth Report: [SYRIA](#)

Note to readers: please click the share buttons above

The United States has raised tensions further amid Syria's ongoing conflict. It has issued a threat in the form of a "warning" against Damascus against retaking the northern region of Idlib. More specifically, the US has accused Damascus [of preparing chemical weapon attacks](#) as part of its alleged strategy to retake the territory.

No evidence has been provided by the US to substantiate these accusations – and it is clear that the warning was actually a threat implicating a planned, staged provocation likely to be followed by US military aggression.

Idlib: Al Qaeda's Syrian Capital

The northern city of Idlib has become the defacto capital for Al Qaeda in Syria.

It is home to Al Qaeda affiliates, partners, and allies including Tahrir al-Sham – formally Jabhat Al Nusra, a US State Department-listed Foreign Terrorist Organization, Nour al-Din al-Zenki – a US-armed and backed military front notorious for its many war atrocities involving torture and executions including the beheading of a child, and Ahrar al-Sham [which has repeatedly cooperated with](#) the self-proclaimed "Islamic State in Syria and Iraq" (ISIS).

The nature of the militants occupying Idlib is well known to Washington, London, Brussels, and the Persian Gulf nations sponsoring them. It is because of this knowledge that the West's media monopolies work feverishly to cover up, deny, defend, or even excuse their atrocities.

When Idlib-based terrorist front Nour al-Din al-Zenki beheaded a child, [the BBC disgracefully attempted to defend the atrocity](#) by suggesting the boy was a "fighter," and attempting to dispute his age, claiming:

...he appears to be as young as 10, although other reports suggest he is considerably older.

The BBC appears indifferent to the fact that if the victim had been a fighter and was over the age of 18, Nour al-Din al-Zenki would *still* be guilty of an egregious war crime.

BBC's defense of war atrocities committed by terrorist organizations occupying Syrian territory is the rule, not the exception – not just for British state broadcaster BBC, but the Western media as a whole. From the beginning of the 2011 conflict, [the BBC and others](#)

[have played a direct role](#) in covering up the terrorist affiliations of fighters attempting to overthrow the Syrian government.

Terrorist Central – A Collaborative Western Project

Idlib remains one of the last remaining strongholds of Al Qaeda in Syria specifically because of its proximity to the Turkish border – Turkey being a NATO member who has provided years of financial, political, and military support to militants operating in Syria.

Idlib has been – since it fell to foreign-sponsored terrorists – so dangerous that much of the governorate is inaccessible to the Western media and Western organizations sending aid to groups occupying it.

US-based think tanks have even written [entire papers on Idlib's status](#) as a dangerous and dysfunctional epicenter of armed militancy. One 2016 paper published by [the Century Foundation](#) titled, "[Keeping the Lights On in Rebel Idlib](#)," would admit:

Restrictive border measures taken by the Turkish government and the security situation inside Idlib mean that access to Idlib is limited. Dangers include aerial bombing, but also the threat of kidnapping by entrepreneurial criminals and some of the groups referenced in this report. With some exceptions, independent Western researchers and journalists can no longer safely work inside Idlib province.

With extremists more recently uprooted from around Damascus and the southern city of Daraa sent to Idlib, the concentration of "*entrepreneurial criminals*" and "*some of the groups*" referenced by the Century Foundation has only risen.

In 2016, the Century Foundation admitted that because of the dangers involved in setting foot in Idlib, their research was conducted via remote interviews – meaning that the Western media today is likely also heavily reliant on such methods to collect information – when they are not simply fabricating it. The Century Foundation would also reveal another important aspect of Idlib's defacto status as Al Qaeda's Syrian capital – the extensive Western support keeping it afloat. The report first notes the leadership role extremist organizations play in Idlib:

Islamist and jihadist armed groups hold power at the local level, and have developed relatively sophisticated service coordination bodies.

The report then admits the networks and local institutions these extremists preside over are entirely funded by the US, UK, and European Union (emphasis added):

In addition to helping organize relief distribution, councils also provide some intermittently successful municipal services, ranging from operating bakeries to street-cleaning and trash disposal, repairs to the water grid, and road maintenance.

Many of these more resource-intensive services are supported by international donors such as the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the United Kingdom's Department for

International Development (DfID), which have made support for civilian governance and service provision a priority. The United States has provided support through a number of offices, including both USAID proper and USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (USAID/OTI), whose "Syria Regional Program" has a more directed, political mandate to support moderate opposition organizations and promote values of tolerance. Some international assistance has been delivered through discrete, branded projects such as "Bil-Akhdar" (In Green) and "Tamkeen" (Empowerment), supported by donors including USAID, the United Kingdom Conflict Pool, and the European Union.

The report also makes mention of the now notorious "White Helmets" and the now defunded and exposed "Free Police:"

Local councils coexist and cooperate with other nascent local institutions, including Syria Civil Defence emergency first responders (the "White Helmets") and the Idlib Free Police, that are also supported by international donor governments.

While the West has doubled down on its support for the "White Helmets" despite extensive evidence linking them directly to Al Qaeda, the so-called "Syrian Free Police" have already been defunded.

The Guardian in their August 2018 article titled, "[Britain to axe funding for scheme supporting Syrian opposition](#)," would admit:

Britain was one of six countries supporting the community-led police force set up after the Syrian uprising in 2011.

The Panorama programme, Jihadis You Pay For, claimed police officers in Idlib province had to be approved by Jabhat al-Nusra and that police officers in Aleppo province were forced to hand over cash to Nour al-Din al-Zinki, another extremist group.

From the actual militant groups occupying Idlib, to the administrative networks attempting to run the region – it is clear extremism now holds the population hostage and does so specifically because of Western aid the West's own think tanks have exposed as ending up directly and exclusively in the hands of terrorists.

Should this support be cut, the fighting capacity of terrorists occupying Idlib would quickly collapse. Continued support by the West of terrorists occupying Idlib ensures a bloody battle to finally liberate the civilian population held hostage and abused by these extremists.

Idlib is thus every bit an "Islamic State" in practice as ISIS was in Raqqa, Syria and Mosul, Iraq – and an "Islamic State" made possible by extensive and fully conscious Western sponsorship.

Truth Aside: The West's Window Dressing

Thus it is not Russian propaganda or a public relations office in Damascus exposing those occupying Idlib as terrorists or the necessity for Syrian forces to liberate the region – it is the Western media through their own incremental admissions made discretely beneath headlines and op-eds like the New York Times' recent piece titled, "[The Death Blow Is](#)

[Coming for Syrian Democracy](#)

The sub-heading for the NYT op-ed would read:

The Assad regime's imminent assault on Idlib will empower jihadists and crush the last of the revolution's democrats. Why is the world standing by?

The absurdity of claiming security operations aimed at uprooting the terrorist occupiers of Idlib will *"empower jihadists"* illustrates the departure from reality of much of what remains of the so-called "opposition." The op-ed laments in its conclusion that:

The people of Idlib are aware that they will probably be abandoned to a fate similar to their countrymen in Daraa and Ghouta. Anger at their betrayal by the supposed democratic powers, already deeply rooted, is growing. The residents understand that those who favor "stability" at any price perceive their continued resistance as an inconvenience. But the resumption of the regime's control in Idlib will not lead to peace, and still less to stability. It will eradicate the democratic alternative to tyranny, leaving the jihadists — who thrive on violence, oppression and foreign occupation — as the last men standing, to constitute a long-term threat to the region and the world.

But if *"the supposed democratic powers"* who engineered Syria's 2011 conflict and propped up the opposition in Idlib ever since don't really care about *"democratic alternatives,"* they probably weren't really *"democratic powers"* to begin with. Their interests in Syria were completely unrelated and merely obfuscated by "humanitarian" and "democratic" concerns, and the entire supposed "revolution" merely an obfuscation for Western-backed regime change in pursuit of regional and global hegemony.

The so-called "opposition" does not really exist as a functional, relevant factor in Syria's conflict and never did. It was a superficiality necessary to dress the windows of Western-backed, violent regime change pursued with equally violent, ruthless terrorist organizations. With the eviction of terrorists from Idlib complete, Syrian forces and their Russian and Iranian allies will have only a tenuous US occupation in eastern Syria and Turkey to the north to contend with.

Attempts to portray Idlib as a bastion of democracy, the Syrian government as a ruthless dictatorship "terrorizing" the population when in reality it is eliminating militants both the West and Damascus agree are *actual* terrorists – all constitute similar attempts at window dressing what is otherwise a very clear and concise battle – one between a sovereign nation defending and liberating its territory, and the proxies of a foreign invasion that have plagued Syria since 2011.

*

Tony Cartalucci is Bangkok-based geopolitical researcher and writer, especially for the online magazine ["New Eastern Outlook"](#) where this article was originally published. He is a frequent contributor to Global Research.

Featured image is from the author.

[**Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page**](#)

[**Become a Member of Global Research**](#)

Articles by: [Tony Cartalucci](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca