

Israeli Army Admits Aiding Al-Qaeda in Syria

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An under-noticed news report last week confirmed previously-held suspicions and strong implications that Israeli troops are aiding the Nusra Front, al-Qaeda's official Syrian affiliate.

Speaking to Israeli occupation troops last week, a *Wall Street Journal* reporter on the ground in Mount Bental (part of the occupied Golan Heights) [found that Israeli troops receive](#) wounded al-Qaeda fighters, treat them in Israeli hospitals and send them back to continue fighting against the government in Syria.

The Nusra Front in August overran the Qunaitra crossing, the checkpoint between the Israeli-occupied and Syrian-controlled sectors of the Golan Heights. Israeli invaded that region of south-west Syria in 1967 and has illegally occupied most of the Golan Heights ever since.

As I pointed out [in a previous column](#), the reports of UN peacekeeping forces since Nusra took over the checkpoint were highly suggestive of Israeli contacts and even military aid to the al-Qaeda rebels. But this *Wall Street Journal* report has confirmed the fact.

"We don't ask who they are, we don't do any screening," the unnamed Israeli military official told the paper of the hospital treatment of al-Qaeda fighters. "Once the treatment is done, we take them back to the border [sic - ceasefire line] and they go on their way [in Syria]," he said.

An unnamed military official also said there is an "understanding" between Israeli forces and al-Qaeda fighters there and that "there is a familiarity of the [al-Qaeda] forces on the ground".

Popular conspiracy theories have it that al-Qaeda and the "Islamic State" (also known as ISIS or ISIL) are Israeli- and/or US-intelligence creations. While there's no evidence for that, it's certainly true that the US-UK invasion of Iraq in 2003, and its consciously sectarian occupation regime of the country thereafter, created the conditions in which al-Qaeda in Iraq (later known as ISIS) was formed and thrived. Veteran journalist Patrick Cockburn demonstrates this most convincingly in his essential new book *The Rise of Islamic State*, which [I have previously lauded here](#).

And now it seems that Israel is in a direct alliance with al-Qaeda in Syria. This is a tactical alliance, meant purely to bleed the country and prolong the civil war.

Read the quotes from Israeli officials in recent months about the Nusra Front and you will see a strange sort of soft-peddling of the group, casting them as a kind of "moderate al-Qaeda" if you will.

"Nusra is a unique version of al-Qaeda," retired Brigadier General Michael Herzog told the Wall Street Journal. "They manage to cooperate with non-Islamist and non-jihadi organizations in one coalition." Herzog is a fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP, the think tank of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the première Israel lobby group in the US) and former chief of staff for Israel's defence minister. The Nusra Front "are totally focused on the war in Syria and aren't focused on us," he claimed. "But when Hezbollah and Iran and others are pushing south, they are very much focused on us."

Hizballah and Iran, allies of the Bashar al-Assad regime, are aiding the government in Syria and fighting on the ground alongside Syrian army troops against al-Qaeda, the "Islamic State" and other Sunni rebel groups.

Even before Nusra took over the Qunairtra checkpoint in August, reports suggested Israel seemed on rather friendly terms with the al-Qaeda affiliate.

In June, army spokesperson [Lieutenant Colonel Peter Lerner told Foreign Policy](#) that the Israeli government has provided medical assistance to more than 1,000 Syrians over the past fourteen months. "We give medical aid to people who are in dire need," he said in a telephone interview with the magazine, echoing the statement made last week to the *Wall Street Journal*. "We don't do any vetting or check where they are from or which group they are fighting for, or whether they are civilians."

Ehud Yaari, an Israeli fellow at WINEP, admitted that Israeli assistance has benefited fighters: "The wounded are both fighters and civilians but there are not too many civilians left because of the fighting raging there ... Close to 900 Syrians have been treated in Israel."

Foreign Policy reports that, even earlier than June 2014, in March 2013: "Some 400 armed opposition fighters, backed by artillery fire from three tanks, seized a Syrian military outpost atop a hill at Tal al-Garbi, planting four black flags and raising concern that extremist groups are moving into the zone.

"More than two weeks later, opposition fighters captured two other strategically important hilltop military outposts in Tal al-Jabiya and Tal al-Sharqi.

"'In the afternoon of 24 April, two members of the armed opposition displayed the severed head of a presumed Syrian armed forces officer as they passed' a UN outpost, according to the [UN] report. By the end of April [2013], UN observers 'detected the flying of black flags believed to be associated with militant groups scattered throughout the central and southern part of the area of separation, including three Syrian armed forces positions captured by the armed members of the opposition.'"

So Israeli aid to al-Qaeda in Syria may have been ongoing for as long as nearly two years now. But what is sure is that Israeli aid to al-Qaeda in Syria has now been confirmed.

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