

Swedish Foreign Aid to Allies of Al Qaeda

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Wednesday 2 September begun as an ordinary day in Latakia in the war-torn Syria. The city is located on the Mediterranean coast in the province with the same name. The past years conflict has passed the city with relative calm. The killings, the destruction and the terrorism have here in so far been absent.

The province Latakia has become a refuge for millions of Syrians who have been forced to leave their homes for the safety of the government controlled area.

But on mid-day 2 September the peace was shattered by a bloody attack. A car bomb detonated outside a school in the northern part of the city, leaving ten dead and forty injured, according to media reports. How many of the inhabitants of Latakia have since fled or how many have considered fleeing is not known.



Khaled Khoja, Syrian coalition's president, admitted in April 2015 that his organization has a tactical alliance with Al Qaeda. The coalition's former president, Ahmad Jarba, was Chairman of the Assistance Fund that received 40 million SEK. In April 1, 2014, he visited the "liberated" the town of Kassab, from where 2.000 Christians were displaced.

It is well established that the peace in Latakia is currently threatened by the alliance of armed rebel groups that control the neighbouring province of Idlib. The alliance includes Al Qaeda terrorists as well as so called 'moderate' opposition groups that have received 40 million SEK in aid from the Swedish government.

That these forces collaborate in the on-going offensive in northwest Syria is no secret.

This was confirmed at a press conference at the UN headquarter in New York on 29 April this year by the president of the Syrian opposition coalition, Khaled Khoja, who said that the armed branch of the opposition, 'The free Syrian Army', had entered into a tactical alliance with Jabhat Al-Nusra, Al Qaeda's official organisation in Syria.

The existence of the alliance is also confirmed by the Swedish ministry for Foreign Affairs special envoy for the crisis in Syria, the ambassador Niklas Kebbon, who we reach via phone:

Bilder



Fakta och bakgrund

Where does the Swedish aid to Syria go?

- It is evident that the opposition coalition is in contact with Jabhat Al-Nusra.

Let us see what Sweden does for Syria:

The official line is that Sweden promotes a political solution to the conflict and invests large sums in humanitarian aid in Syria and its neighbouring countries.

But that is not the whole truth. There is a separate, less widely discussed Swedish support.

Sweden has for years backed Syrian opposition figures who have repeatedly called for more weapons to the opposition and more foreign intervention in Syria, while simultaneously collaborating with Al Qaeda-inspired extremists that have been complicit in mass murder, pillaging and mass expulsions.

This same opposition has most certainly contributed to the dire situation in today's Syria, and the mass exodus from the country that is its consequence.

Ahmad Jarba is one of those who in Sweden and other western countries have been given prominence as a leader of the future 'democratic' Syria. Jarba was from July 2013 until July 2014 the president of the Syrian National Coalitions for the Forces of Revolution and the Resistance, a group that is often referred to as the Syrian Coalition, or the National Coalition. During his tenure he was welcomed at the UN head quarter as well as by several western heads of state.

On 1 April 2014, Jarba uploaded photographs of himself from the city of Kassab, then recently taken by the rebels. Kassab is a small city in northwestern Syria with a predominantly christian Armenian population, located by the border to Turkey.

The pictures of the Syrian opposition leader Jarba in Kassab was widely publicised by western media. His silence regarding the event that preceded the visit left many questions unanswered. The Swedish national broadcasting company (SVT) pointed out that the Syrian opposition president failed to mention that the invading rebels had forced the expulsion of the city's 2000 inhabitants.

In fact, the situation was even worse than that.

- When Ahmad Jarba visited Kassab he literally stepped in the blood from the killed Armenians, says 'Sara'.

- Sweden has during the conflict donated large sums in foreign aid. The government has vowed 350 million SEK during 2015. Most of the money goes to UN organisations such as UNHCR and Unicef, and other international aid organisations.
- But Sweden has also invested large sums that are said to promote democracy, the creation of a just rule, and to the defence of human rights. Behind the beautiful words, tens of millions SEK have gone to forces that have done the exact opposite.

Syrian Recovery Trust Fund

- One of the main commitments to strengthen the west supported Syrian coalition is the support to the political aid organisation SRTF. Sweden has donated 40 million SEK and shares a position in the board of the SRTF with the other nordic countries.
- The initiator to the fund was the

The Proletaren comes in contact with Sara through the Nobel peace prize laureate Mairead Maguire, who we have previously interviewed. Due to security concerns, Sara does not want us to print her real name.

Sara was born in a western country but has for the past 20 years resided in Latakia. Until the summer of 2014 she often visited Kassab, where her family owned a summer house. Today the house is demolished. Before the rebels were forced out of Kassab in June 2014, they pillaged and vandalised homes, official buildings and churches, Sara's family's house included.

Sara has met many of the inhabitants that were forced to leave Kassab. Many fled to Latakia and some of them stayed during the first few months in the Armenian church. Today many of Kassab's former citizens have left Syrian and made their way to Europe, the United States and Armenia.

The stories from the witnesses of what happened on 21 March 2014 and the subsequent weeks are clear and consistent. The armed men, many of them not from Syria, came from the Turkish side of the border. Jabhat Al-Nusra and other extremist islamist groups fought along side their supposedly moderate rebel allies from the Syrian opposition coalition.

Most civilians managed to escape the onslaught, but not all. Thirteen were decapitated by the invading extremists. According to what has been gathered from witness reports, at least 80 people were killed. Around 20 senior citizens were at the same time kidnapped in Turkey and released first after three months of imprisonment.

This is the background to Ahmad Jarbas visit to the 'liberated' city of Kabbas.

So what does this have to do with Swedish foreign aid?

The answer is that Sweden has supported the Syrian opposition coalition that Ahmad Jarba presided in several ways. The support was initiated by the conservative-liberal coalition government under foreign minister Carl Bildt, and has continued under the ministry of Margot Wallström and the labour-green party government coalition.

To get a picture of the support to the opposition, we have requested official documents from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Swedish aid organisation Sida. Some

Syrian opposition coalition together with USA, Germany and UAE. Turkey plays a central role as the basis of the trust's operation is based in Gaziantep, Turkey, near the Syrian border.

- The SRTF is thus led by some of the forces that are most responsible for the devastating war through both weapons deliveries and monetary support to the rebels.

Unity from the conservatives to the left

- In the Swedish parliament there is a consensus regarding the Syria policy. In July 2013 foreign minister Carl Bildt (conservative) stated that he and the Left party's representative Hans Linde agreed in the Syria question. Hans Linde said that the question of Syria was not a question for domestic bickering.

Terrorist groups according to the UN

- Jabhat Al-Nusra that fight along

documents have been provided to us in full, others have been partly classified.

The single most important Swedish donation to the Syrian opposition took place two years ago.

The Swedish government under Prime minister Fredrik Reinfeldt decided on 26 July 2013 to donate 40 million SEK to the Syrian Recovery Trust Fund (SRTF) with the purpose to act in so called liberated areas of Syria.

- It's a political foundation. Part of its goals are to strengthen the Syrian opposition coalition as an alternative to more extreme groups by providing public services in areas outside government control, says the Swedish envoy to Syria Niklas Kebbon when we speak to him regarding the Swedish foreign aid to Syria.

The background to the founding of the SRTF is described in a report to the foreign affairs ministry written by Jan Thesleff, formerly the Swedish envoy to the Syrian opposition.

On 28 January 2013, representatives from 55 countries convened in Paris to discuss the future of Syria together with the Syrian opposition coalition. According to the Thesleff report, the French foreign affairs minister then remarked that the opposition is suffering from a 'problem of legitimacy' on the ground in Syria. A central question of the Paris meeting was therefore to assess what the rest of the world could do to strengthen the support of the opposition in the 'liberated areas'.

The solution to this question took the form of the Syrian Recovery Trust Fund, with the purpose of offering public services in the name of the opposition and with the goal of increasing the coalitions popular support.

Sweden vowed to contribute to its funding, as did several other countries. The German development bank became the administrator of the fund, and Turkey its basis of operations.

The Syrian opposition was promoted to chair the board of SRTF. At the official inauguration of the fund on 2 September 2013, its contract was signed by the foremost spokesperson of the opposition, the war-criminal-to-be Ahmad Jarba. In October the same year, Sweden paid 40 million SEK to the fund, as promised.

side opposition groups supported by Sweden, is according to the UN security council a terrorist group. Jabhat Al-Nusra has together with IS and other groups been pointed out in several UNSC resolutions as groups with connections to Al Qaeda.

Most refugees in Syria

- According to statistics from the UN refugee organisation UNHCR there is in Syria 7.6 million internal refugees, who in most cases have fled from areas of conflict into areas controlled by the Syrian government. A small fraction stay in tent camps, while most of the refugees stay with family, friends or have found new accommodation.
- Over 4 million refugees have fled the country, most to neighbouring countries.

Sweden is not the biggest villain in the Syrian conflict. Much worse are the countries that

have pumped in money and weapons directly to the armed extremist groups, such as the NATO member Turkey, the royal dictatorships of Saudi Arabia and Qatar, and the USA that has played a leading role in creating the conflict.

But Sweden is complicit.

Swedish tax money has ever since Carl Bildt's meeting with the Syrian opposition at the mansion of Hasselby slott, Stockholm, in August 2012 supported forces that are complicit in crimes at least as serious as those the Swedish government accuse the Syrian government of.

On 25 March 2014, at the same time as armed rebels invaded Kassab, Ahmad Jarba took part in the summit of the League of Arab States in Kuwait City. There Jarba denied the request of the UN negotiator Lakhdar Brahimi to stop the import of weapons to Syria, a suggestion proposed to aid the attempts to reach a political solution to the conflict.

The message from the by Sweden supported opposition leader was quite the opposite: we want more weapons and heavier weapons, he stated to the present media.

Not even the mass expulsion from Kassab made the world change its opinion of Jarba and the opposition coalition. Six weeks after walking on Kassab's bloody streets, Jarba shook hands with Barack Obama in the White House.

How can Sweden support an opposition that commits crimes and is in alliance with Jabhat Al-Nusra, which according to the UN security council are terrorists in the same category as the Islamic State (Isil)?

We bring these questions up with the foreign affairs representative, the envoy to Syria Niklas Kebbon.

- The Syrian opposition coalition collaborates with forces that Sweden hardly wants any connections with. The coalition president Khaled Khoja admitted on 29 April this year that they and their armed forces FSA are in tactical alliance with the terrorists in Jabhat Al-Nusra. What are your discussions regarding this?

- The premise of the fund is that obviously there should be no collaboration with groups that have been branded as terrorists by the UN Security council. Our position has been to work for a solution that in no way gives support to to Jabhat Al-Nusra, IS, or other suspicious organisations, says Niklas Kebbon.

- But there are more countries represented in the board of directors, and there are different opinions on how restrictive one should be. Our starting point has been that the purpose of the fund is to deliver public services to the population in these areas, but of course this should not be done in a way that benefits terrorist branded organisations.

- But is it possible to tell these groups apart? I have in mind when Ahmad Jarba entered Kassab during the spring of 2014 after 'moderate' rebels together with Al Qaeda forced the expulsion of 2000 inhabitants.

- Yes, you are pointing to an example where the opposition coalition had some sort of dealings with such organisations. The purpose of the fund is in part that the interim government of the coalition should become an alternative to the extremist organisations. We have all, no I mean, we don't all have contact with Jabhat Al-Nusra, but the opposition coalition does. I don't believe they have very close contact, but of course such contacts

exist.

From Latakia Sara sends us an email saying that the Syrians that have fled to the city don't want to leave Syria, don't want to go the refugee camps in the neighbouring countries and don't want to go the Europe or the USA.

But their safety concerns are mounting. And their worries don't come from the Assad government or the Syrian army, but rather from the alliance of Al Qaeda extremists and the by Sweden supported opposition. The front is just an hour's drive from Latakia.

- The city is facing the impending threat of a major attack. While the defence of the Syrian army is strong, the viability of defending Latakia depends on the number of terrorists attacking. We are in a terrible situation.

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