

Turkey Supports Al Qaeda in Syria. Complicit in the Kidnapping of Syrian Orthodox Bishops

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By Dikran Ego

On April 22, 2013 Bishops Yuhanna Ibrahim and Paul Yazici were kidnapped in Syria. During the kidnapping their driver was murdered. A fourth person in the car, Fuad Eliya, was released. Bishop Yuhanna Ibrahim is of the Syriac Orthodox Church and was considered the strongest candidate to succeed the current Patriarch. Bishop Paul Yazici is of the Greek Orthodox Church, he is the brother of the current patriarch. ❌

The Bishops left the Turkish border on April 22, heading towards Aleppo. In the silver coloured Kia Sorrento was also Fuad Eliya and Bishop Ibrahim's driver, Fathallah Kabud. Bishop Paul Yazici was on his way home to Aleppo after an overseas trip. To get home safely to Syria he asked Bishop Ibrahim to pick him up at the Bab El-Hawa border crossing. 20 kilometers from the border crossing the car stopped at a checkpoint controlled by the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and passed without incident. About two kilometers from this checkpoint, at 3:45 PM, the car was stopped by eight heavily armed men.

According to Fuad Eliya, the only survivor of the kidnapping, the perpetrators were not Syrians, but seemed to be people who came from Caucasus. Their clothes were similar to Taliban attire. One of the kidnappers forced the driver out of the car and put himself behind the wheel, another armed man sat in the backseat of the car, and they drove behind the kidnappers' blue truck. The cars changed direction and drove back to Bab El-Hawa. This is where the Bishops were last seen.

The Chaos In Syria And Turkey's Role In The Conflict

Since the war broke out in Syria, Turkey has played an active role in the conflict. The Syrian opposition's headquarters are in Istanbul. The Free Syrian Army runs its operations virtually from refugee camps in Turkey that are placed along the Syrian border. Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey have supported and financed the Syrian opposition, helping with logistics and weapons. But Turkey has played an ever more active role and has successively increased weapons deliveries to the opposition. Even the more radical groups, such as Al-Nusra and many more which are associated with Al-Qaeda, have received weapons from Turkey. The chaos in Syria has attracted jihadist groups from many countries in the region. The 900 kilometer border between Turkey and Syria has become a gateway to Syria for jihadist groups.

Russia has supported the regime in the Syrian civil war. Russia's support has evoked reactions from Muslims in the Caucasus region, which have been drawn to the Jihad in Syria.

Jihadists from the Caucasus have two reasons to engage in the “holy war” in Syria, to help their Sunni co-religionists and to exact revenge on Russia, which according to the jihadists has been oppressing them in the Caucasus. But these jihadist groups have rarely participated in any real battles, instead they prefer to amuse themselves by plundering and murdering innocent civilians. Often they commit war crimes and crimes against humanity. This [propaganda video](#) is one of many examples showing how brutally these terrorists act. Those who watch the video can see that these terrorists are from the Russian Caucasus. The “holy war” — Jihad — has united many extremists from Chechnya, Dagestan, Azerbaijan, Turkey, the Balkans and many other Muslim countries. They have been able to move inside Turkey unhindered, along the Syrian border.

It has been generally known that Turkey has helped these extremists with weapon and logistics. But in the last few months Turkey has been caught red-handed several times. Turkish media that slipped past Turkish state censorship reported the following:

- A truck loaded with armour-piercing rockets was stopped outside Adana, close to the Syrian border. It was heading to the rebels in Syria but was stopped at the police check point.
- In early January, 2014 a police roadblock stopped a truck headed to Syria. The police began searching the truck but were stopped by the Turkish secret service, MIT, who escorted the truck to Syria. According to the Turkish ministry of interior, the cargo consisted of clothes, medicine and other emergency care for Turkmens in Syria. But the question is why a load of “emergency care” was being escorted by Turkish secret agents, which report directly to Prime Minister Erdogan. A couple of days later the Turkmens organizations denied that they had received any emergency care from Turkey.

As a result of Turkey’s involvement and to the active support for the extremist groups, eleven Syrian civil opposition organizations decided to take Turkey to the court for Human Rights in Europe.

The Caucasus “Holy War” in Syria

The extremist group which consists of many different ethnicities from the Caucasus was founded in 2006 under the name “Caucasus Emirate” during the Chechen war against Russia. This Caucasian mobilization is now also in Syria. The terrorists from the Caucasus excel in their brutality. Abu Omar the Chechen, who founded the Hattab brigade very quickly made a name for himself. Several small groups that came from the Caucasus announced their allegiance to Abu Omar the Chechen. In Syria these groups were called the “Turkish Brothers.” The Caucasus Emirate has at various times been allied with the Free Syrian Army and Al Qaeda. Lately the group has joined the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Jihadist groups which are terrorising the population of Syria along the Turkish border are well known to Turkey. These jihadists are provided with weapons and communications equipment such as walky-talkies by the Turkish secret service MIT.

One of these jihadist groups is lead by Abu Amer el-Kuwaiti, who controls his operations in the Aleppo area from the Turkish border city of Antakya. Abu Amer el-Kuwaiti is assisted by a person from Dagestan by the name of Magomed Abdurrakhmanov, who uses the code name Abu Banat (in Turkish Ebu Benat). It is this person who is suspected of kidnapping the Bishops. We will return to this shortly.

During the summer of 2013 a [video](#) clip appeared on YouTube showing a person brutally cutting off the heads of three men. People in the video, including the killer, speak Russian. You can also hear a Turkish voice that says “sit down, sit down” so that there is a clear view of the slaughter. The person who is performing the decapitation in the video is Magomed Abdulrahmanov, a.k.a. Abu Banat. The brutal slaughter drew the ire of many in many different parts of the world. When these horrible pictures appeared in the media there was speculation about who this man is. Information about Abu Banat’s real identity appeared on several Russian websites and forums ([here](#) and [here](#)). When his identity was disclosed it was learned that he was a police officer in Dagestan who had found his way to Jihad in Syria.

In the beginning of 2013 Abu Banat’s group established itself close to the village El-Meshed, which is only five kilometers away from the border crossing at Bab El-Hawa. He married a woman from the village of El-Meshed. Abu Banat wanted to show his authority through brutality. He terrorized the villagers and murdered a villager to set an example. He instituted harsh Sharia laws, such as those who smoke would lose a finger and those who drink alcohol will be punished. News of about Abu Banat’s brutality spread. His group engaged in raids and terrorized the surrounding areas.

The group’s activities drew attention and rumors started to circulate about a “fantasy camp” with lots of weapons, money, valuables and jihadists who played video games on PlayStations. News of the group’s raids and brutality reached the Free Syrian Army, which sent a group of soldiers to investigate. The FSA claims the group never participated in the war against the Syrian regime but devoted itself exclusively to looting. A battle occurred between the FSA and Abu Banat’s group which resulted in the dissolution of the group.

Abu Banat Is Detained In Istanbul

On April 23, 2013 the police stopped a car outside the city of Konya. In the car they found a Syrian woman and three other persons of Chechen origin. All were missing valid ID documents. The Turkish magazine Radikal reported this event with the headline Orthodox Bishops’ murderer arrested in Konya. The magazine also wrote that because these persons did not have valid ID documents they were deported to their home countries.

But that was not so. The police released all of them after they received a residential address in a suburb of Istanbul where the group lives.

With the memory of the brutal decapitation video fresh in his mind, one of the police officers recognized one of the persons in the car. He reported to the police in Istanbul about his suspicions of the group. A local magazine in Konya intercepted the police report and the news spread throughout Turkey. Several magazines wrote that the Bishops’ murderer had been arrested in Konya. When the police searched the house at the given address they found weapons and grenades. The group was arrested for violation of the Arms Act and preparation for terrorist attacks. The group has been in police custody since the summer of 2013, in the Maltepe prison in Istanbul.

When the news about the group that was suspected of kidnapping of the Bishops spread, the authorities stated the group had been deported. Why was this stated when in reality the persons were in police custody in Istanbul? The answer was discovered after access to the police investigation report was gained. According to the report, Abu Banat is known to the Turkish secret service MIT, who have supplied him with equipment.

The Turkish Government's Handling of the Events

When the news about the arrest of the suspected murderer of the Bishops spread in Turkey, Bishop Yusuf Cetin of the Syriac Orthodox Church contacted the Turkish government. Secretary of State Ahmet Davutoglu had on several occasions commented on the kidnapping case. In a meeting with Syriac Orthodox Church Bishops, Davutoglu said that he had received intelligence reports that the Bishops were still alive and that Turkey is doing everything to save them. Secretary of State Davutoglu had given the impression that they have knowledge of who the kidnappers are. Prime Minister Erdogan also made similar statements when he visited Stockholm and met Assyrian representatives in the beginning of November, 2013. As late as last Christmas the former Turkish attorney general Sadullah Ergin said to the Greek Orthodox Church in Hatay the government was working on saving the Bishops. These and many other statements were been given by Turkish officials despite the fact that the Bishops' suspected murderer was in police custody in Istanbul. All indications point to the fact that Turkey had a hand in the Bishops' kidnapping and has therefore done everything to hide the truth about the suspected murderer.

On September 29th, 2013 investigative journalist Erkan Metin published a long article on www.suryaniler.com. During his investigation, Mr. Metin discovered that Abu Banat's is Magomed Abdurkhmanov from Dagestan and that he might be in custody. Mr. Metin contacted the police and confirmed that they were holding a person named Magomed Abdurakhmanov — contrary to press and government reports that he and his group had been deported. Abu Banat's group was in police custody at the Meltepe prison in Istanbul.

Upon further investigation Mr. Metin discovered a link between Abu Banat's group and the kidnapping of the Bishops. A website (www.kavakazcenter.com) that belongs to the "Caucasus Emirate" featured on July 3, 2013 the headline Russian footsteps in Syria, and claimed that it was the group led by Abu Banat that was behind the kidnapping of the Bishops. The website also stated that Abu Banat is a Russian agent. The website said that according to its sources in Syria, the Bishops had been killed by an explosive belt strapped to their backs (this method is often used by the Taliban in Afghanistan).

But why would Abu Banat, who is a member of the Caucasus Emirate, be disavowed by being identified as a Russian agent?

According to Erkan Metin, the video of the decapitation on YouTube was the breaking point. The Caucasus Emirate wanted to distance itself from a group that had drawn negative attention to itself. This was also confirmed by the Turkish police interrogation of Abu Banat about the decapitation. According to the transcript of the hearing, which was published officially in December 2013, Abu Banat said the following:

It was I who decapitated these three persons. It was the first time I had decapitated a human. But I don't understand why these came up on the Internet. It was something we did every Friday after we sentenced people in the Sharia court. I executed the punishment by decapitation.

When the report of the investigation of Abu Banat's group was released publicly the results of Erkan Metin's investigation were corroborated — that the group was responsible for the kidnapping of the Bishops. The following are key findings from the report:

- The police made a superficial hearing and avoided going deeper into the events.

No questions were asked about the kidnapping of the Bishops.

- Abu Banat confessed that it was he who decapitated the persons in the YouTube video.
- Abu Banat said that he had received walkie-talkies from a person by the name Abu-Cahfer from the Turkish secret service.
- Abu Banat and his companion were injured, probably in the battle with the FSA, and fled from Syria.
- Secret documents which were published during the investigation showed that on April 26th 2013, four days after the kidnapping of the Bishops, the Turkish secret service MIT wrote a report to the state department in Ankara. In this report it described how the Bishops had been taken and moved between different locations before they were finally brought to the village Mashad Rihin (also called el-Meshad) outside Aleppo. This information tied Abu Banat to the kidnapping of the Bishops. Since his group was using Turkish walkie-talkies, the Turkish secret service MIT monitored the conversations and mapped their activities and movements carefully.
- Abu Banat acknowledged that he had committed both war crimes and crimes against humanity. The ministry of justice refused to file charges on the grounds that this was a Syrian matter.

Questions to Prime Minister Erdogan

Erol Dora, an Assyrian member of the Turkish Parliament, submitted a written question to Prime Minister Erdogan about Turkey's involvement in the kidnapping of the Bishops and the country's relationship to the suspected killer. Erol Dora also asked the justice minister Bekir Bozdogan why the ministry refused to try a person who had admitted that he decapitated people in Syria. According to Erol Dora, who is a lawyer, the Turkish constitution says such crimes do not necessarily have to occur in Turkey for the perpetrator to be tried.

Conclusions

Turkey is supporting the Syrian opposition, allowing jihadists to pass through its territory to Syria. Evidence strongly indicates that Turkey knew about the jihadist group led by Abu Banat, and this group had kidnapped the Bishops. The Turkish secret service, MIT,

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