

Released Italian journalist recounts crimes of US-backed Syrian opposition

Alex Lantier

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Domenico Quirico, a journalist for Italy's *La Stampa* newspaper who was held 152 days by US-backed Syrian opposition forces, recounted his captivity in an editorial this weekend in *La Stampa* and in the British *Guardian*. Though he initially supported opposition forces, Quirico now confirms widespread reports of the criminal character of the opposition.

Quirico was captured after traveling to cover opposition groups fighting in the strategic city of Qusayr on April 8, together with Belgian teacher Pierre Piccinin. He reports that they were captured in another apparently false-flag operation by opposition forces posing as Syrian police.

He writes, "We were stopped by two pick-up trucks full of masked men. They made us get out, took us to a house and beat us up, claiming to be police officers working for the regime. In the following days, we discovered that they were fervent Islamists who prayed five times a day to their God in solemn tones. On the Friday, they listened to the sermon of a preacher urging jihad against Bashar al-Assad. The decisive proof came when we were bombarded from the air. It was clear we were being held by rebel forces."

Quirico and Piccinin were initially held by a militia led by a fighter nicknamed Abu Omar, and then transferred to various other Islamist militias. They complained of receiving poor food and repeated beatings, and Quirico was twice subjected to mock executions.

All of this was done, as Quirico points out, by groups enjoying the backing of Washington and its European allies. He writes, "Abu Omar gave an Islamic gloss to the criminal activities of his band and had links with Al Farouq, the group that then took control of us. Al Farouq is a well-known brigade of the Syrian revolution, part of the Syrian National Council, and its

representatives have held meetings with European governments."

Above all, Quirico paints a devastating portrait of the criminal activities of the different Islamist militias in whose custody he and Piccinin were kept. He writes, "The West trusts them, but I learned to my cost that we are talking about a new and disturbing phenomenon in the revolt: the emergence of a group of Somali-style bandits who use an Islamic veneer and the context of the revolution to control pieces of territory, extort money from the population, kidnap people, and generally fill their boots."

In captivity, Quirico and Piccinin were a political embarrassment not only for the Islamist forces who captured them, but also for Western governments, who were pursuing a criminal policy in Syria. While they were in opposition custody, the United States and its allies tried to start a war with Syria, claiming it was needed to protect the pro-democratic Syrian opposition from Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's forces and Assad's alleged use of chemical weapons.

The reports of these two journalists, though initially friendly to the Syrian opposition, show that these pretenses were all cynical lies designed to allow Washington and its allies to begin a criminal war of aggression against Syria allied with Al Qaeda-linked forces.

Quirico's remarks constitute confirmation from a pro-opposition source of the widespread reports that the Syrian opposition forces largely consist of bandits pillaging schools, bakeries and pharmaceutical factories, and other key facilities.

For his part, Piccinin has charged that opposition forces carried out the August 21 Ghouta chemical attack that Washington blamed on the Syrian regime in order to provide a false pretext for war (see "Belgian

academic blames Syrian poison gas attacks on US-backed opposition”).

A recent study by the well-known British defense consultancy, HIS Jane’s, confirms that the opposition consists overwhelmingly of violent, far-right Islamist forces. Advance press reports indicate that Jane’s estimates the overall strength of the opposition at 100,000 men, divided into approximately 1,000 bands.

Of these, approximately 10,000 are fighting for militias directly linked to Al Qaeda, such as the Al Nusra Front and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). These forces lead much of the fighting and control much of the oil and grain resources of opposition-held parts of northern Syria.

Many of these fighters are foreign jihadists assembled by the CIA and allied intelligence agencies from countries around the world, according to a recent report by UN official Paulo Pinheiro. He said, “Across northern Syria, there has been an upsurge in crimes and abuses committed by extremist anti-government armed groups, along with an influx of foreign fighters. Entire brigades are now made up from fighters who have crossed into Syria, with Al Muhajireen being one of the most active.”

According to Jane’s, another 35,000 opposition fighters share Al Qaeda’s outlook, while Jane’s classifies another 30,000 fighters as part of allegedly more “moderate” Islamist groups. However, the “moderate” category apparently includes such bloody Islamist bandits as the Al Farouq Brigades.

Charles Lister, who put together the Jane’s report, told the *Daily Telegraph*: “The idea that it is mostly secular groups leading the opposition is just not borne out.”



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