

Trial collapses after threatened exposure of UK backing of Syrian terror groups

Simon Whelan
15 June 2015

At the London Old Bailey on June 1, the prosecution of Swedish national Bherlin Gildo for terrorist activities in Syria collapsed.

Gildo's case was dismissed when his lawyers revealed that the British security and intelligence agencies actively supported the same Syrian opposition groups he was charged with joining.

Gildo had joined Kataib al-Muhajireen before he then worked with the Jabhat al-Nusra, the official affiliate in Syria of al-Qaeda. Along with the Islamic State (ISIS), they remain the principal fighting forces in the US-backed war to overthrow the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Arrested in London on October 2014, on route from Copenhagen to Manila, the 37-year-old Gildo faced three charges. He was accused of attending a terrorist training camp, receiving weapons training between August 2012 and March 2013, and possessing information likely to be useful to terrorist objectives.

Gildo was arrested while changing flights at Heathrow Airport under schedule 7 of the 2000 Terrorism Act, the same statute used to hold and interrogate David Miranda, the Brazilian partner of the former *Guardian* journalist Glenn Greenwald, who played a central role in the publication of Edward Snowden's revelations about National Security Agency spying operations.

Gildo's prosecution under the Act followed an extension of offences it covers to include non-UK nationals. The offence of fighting in Syria is not a criminal offence in his native Sweden.

In court, Gildo's lawyers argued that British intelligence agencies were party to repeated secret operations in the Levant, providing weaponry and so-called "non-lethal" equipment to the same Syrian Islamist terrorists Gildo was being prosecuted for

fighting alongside.

Henry Blaxland QC, the defence counsel, said if the British "government was actively involved in supporting armed resistance to the Assad regime at a time when the defendant was present in Syria and himself participating in such resistance it would be unconscionable to allow the prosecution to continue."

Speaking for the prosecution, Riel Karmy-Jones said the judge was aware "the prosecution requested an adjournment of three weeks to consider a number of different issues that had arisen at various stages of the case."

Karmy-Jones added, "Following that full review the prosecution consider there is no longer a reasonable prospect of conviction in this case."

Due to the politically sensitive nature of the trial, some reporting restrictions had been placed. Following the revelations, Judge Nicholas Hilliard removed the restrictions and entered a not guilty verdict on all charges.

After the hearing, Gildo's solicitor, Gareth Peirce, said, "He has been detained in this country although he did not ever intend to enter this country."

Gildo's defence presented evidence, in the form of articles in the *Guardian* and *New York Times*, revealing details of arms being funnelled from the west to the Syrian opposition. Also submitted was a *London Review of Books* article by Seymour Hersh, implicating MI6, the UK's foreign security agency, in a "rat line" system transferring both Islamist fighters and arms from the arsenals of Libya to the Sunni rebels in Syria.

Peirce told the media, "There is a fair amount of documentation that arms were being taken out of Libya via Qatar and Turkey and trucked through into Syria to the resistance and the same from Croatia and taken through Jordan. Given that there is a reasonable basis

for believing that the British were themselves involved in the supply of arms, if that's so, it would be an utter hypocrisy to prosecute someone who has been involved in the armed resistance.”

Gildo was essentially kidnapped by the British state and charged with crimes for which it was in fact culpable.

Gildo, when detained by British security, was in possession of a mobile phone containing images of himself pointing skyward surrounded by bloody Syrian corpses. The Sunni Islamists commit daily crimes and atrocities against captured Syrian army recruits and religious minorities.

While publicly opposing such groups, the US and Britain are simultaneously backing the Islamist opposition in Syria to overthrow the Alawite-dominated regime and are supporting forces opposed to the Shia-dominated Baghdad government.

While such a Janus-faced policy by the Western imperialist powers appears contradictory, it has a definite logic for British imperialism. When the interests of Western imperialism and the Sunni Islamists converge or coincide, such as during the overthrow of Gaddafi in Libya and now the Baathist regime in Damascus, the British, French and US intelligence services utilise the Islamists as proxy shock troops. As a result, British foreign policy, like that of Washington, descends ever deeper into criminality.

The ultimate aim of the US and Britain is to undermine the major Eurasian powers, namely Russia and China, and regional powers like Iran, and secure their own unchallenged domination of Middle Eastern oil supplies.

Just prior to the trial's collapse, the US government, following a Freedom of Information request, was forced to release a secret seven-page US Defense Intelligence Agency report dated August 12, 2012. It stated, “the Salafist [sic], the Muslim Brotherhood, and AQI [Al Qaeda in Iraq] are the major forces driving the insurgency in Syria,” while noting that “the West, Gulf countries, and Turkey” support the opposition; while Russia, China and Iran “support the [Assad] regime.”

British and American military and intelligence support for al-Qaeda and ISIS-like terror groups in the struggle for control of Eurasia is a long-established tactic. During the 1980s, through the conduit of the Pakistani intelligence service, the imperialist powers,

together with extensive funding from the Saudi royal family, sought to undermine the Soviet-backed Afghan government through the arming and incitement of the Mujahedeen and the organisation of the “Arab Afghans” into al-Qaeda.

In Syria, as was the case in Afghanistan, the most bloodthirsty Islamists are deemed by the imperialist intelligence agencies as the most effective in terrorising their armed opponents and the general population. Therefore groups like Jabhat al-Nusra, who daily engage in extortion, kidnapping, rape and bloody mass executions of their Shia and Alawite enemies and even one-time Sunni allies, are widely supported by the Western security services.

The British government cannot openly support the aims of the Islamists fighting in Syria, which would expose the “War on Terror” as a naked pretext for the reestablishment of colonial-style imperialist dominance of the Middle East and North Africa. But the Gildo case confirms the dirty secret of Western imperialism. Regardless of all their lofty words on waging a generational struggle against Islamic terrorism, the intelligence services are up to their necks in arming, training and inciting Sunni Islamist militias to terrorise and subjugate the Syrian and Iraqi people.

In Jordan and elsewhere in the region, Western military trainers are drilling those who today are officially sanctioned as “moderate” Islamists, but who tomorrow will appear in the rank and file of ISIS and similar outfits.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact