

Israel intervenes to extract US-UK-backed White Helmets from Syria

Bill Van Auken
23 July 2018

Israeli troops, with the backing of Washington and other major NATO powers, carried out an operation over the weekend to evacuate some 800 operatives of the so-called White Helmets organization from southern Syria, where government forces have staged a major offensive to retake areas previously held by Western-backed Islamist militias.

The White Helmets, ostensibly a civil defense group dedicated to rescuing civilians caught in the fighting in Syria, has been heavily funded by the US and European powers. It has operated solely in areas controlled by the so-called rebels, who are armed and funded by the US and its NATO allies, together with Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu commented on the operation Sunday, stating: “Several days ago President Trump contacted me, as did Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau and others, and requested that we assist in evacuating hundreds of White Helmets from Syria. These are people who have saved lives and whose lives were in danger.”

The Israel Defense Forces reportedly opened up border crossings in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights and provided a heavily armed escort for the White Helmets, who were loaded on buses and taken to Jordan. The IDF issued a statement describing its actions as “an exceptional humanitarian gesture.”

The Jordanian Foreign Ministry acknowledged in a press release the role played by Amman in the operation in allowing the US-backed operatives to pass through its territory.

“The [Jordanian] government allowed the UN to organize passage of about 800 Syrian citizens through Jordan for their naturalization in Western states after the three Western states, namely the United Kingdom, Germany and Canada, proposed in writing... to

undertake their resettlement for a certain period of time due to the threat to their lives.”

British Foreign Minister Jeremy Hunt said on Sunday that the UK had to evacuate the White Helmets to ensure their “immediate protection.”

CNN reported last week that the evacuation of some 1,000 White Helmets and their families from Syria had been discussed during the recent NATO summit in response to the advances made by Syrian government forces.

Canadian Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland said that she had “called for global leadership to support and help these heroes” during a meeting of foreign ministers at the NATO summit in Brussels a week ago.

Both the Israeli and Jordanian governments, while joining in the rescue of the White Helmets, have sealed their borders to the tens of thousands of refugees fleeing the fighting in Syria’s Daraa and Quneitra provinces. Israel has allowed in no refugees since the war for regime change was initiated in Syria seven years ago. It has, however, provided arms, supplies and medical care to Islamist “rebels” fighting the Syrian government.

This weekend’s extraordinary operation, transferring Syrians across Israel into Jordan for resettlement in Europe and Canada, was not a “humanitarian” intervention, but rather the salvaging of individuals who have served as assets in the Western-backed campaign to topple the government of President Bashar al-Assad and replace it with a pliant stooge regime.

The White Helmets were created in 2013 principally by the US and UK governments, with additional funding from the German, Dutch and Danish governments. The principal figure involved in the group’s founding was the former British army officer and MI6 agent James Le Mesurier, who went on to

work as a mercenary for Gulf oil monarchies in conjunction with a company linked to the infamous former US military contractor, Blackwater.

Le Mesurier trained Syrians in Turkey and then sent them back into Syria to function as a logistical support and propaganda arm of the Western-backed “rebels.”

Operating principally in zones controlled by the Al Nusra Front, the Syrian affiliate of Al Qaeda, and its allies, the White Helmets filmed staged rescues in areas hit by bombs dropped by government and Russian warplanes, passing on the videos to the Western corporate media, which aired them without any questions.

The group has been accused of fabricating both attacks and rescues, most infamously in the case of an alleged gas attack in the city of Douma on April 7. While film of the “attack’s” supposed aftermath was broadcast in the US and throughout Europe, residents and doctors at the facility where the White Helmets filmed themselves yelling “gas” and hosing down children with water came forward to say that there had been no attack.

The patent aim of the fabricated incident, as with similar cases previously, was to provoke a US-NATO intervention. The US, the UK and France responded by launching more than 100 missiles on multiple targets in Syria a week later.

Representatives of the White Helmets have been among the most vocal in calling on the US and its allies to impose a “no-fly zone” in Syria, a tactic that would require a massive military occupation of the country and that would heighten the danger of a military confrontation between the world’s two major nuclear powers, the US and Russia.

Videos have surfaced showing members of the White Helmets carrying weapons with Al Nusra forces and participating in atrocities against Syrian government troops.

The White Helmets have enjoyed massive funding. Much of the money has been channeled through private contractors working for the US and British governments.

The US funds have flowed through Chemonics, a Washington, D.C.-based contractor that has also been active in Afghanistan and Libya. USAID awarded the company \$128.5 million in January 2013 to support “a peaceful transition to a democratic and stable Syria.” It

is estimated that at least \$32 million of this money had been funneled into the White Helmets.

Mayday Rescue, a UK-based company, has funneled tens of millions more to the “civil defense” group.

Germany, Canada, and the UK have all reportedly agreed to accept the White Helmets members as refugees, while closing the door to other Syrians fleeing the war.

Washington, however, has made no such offer. While pouring tens of millions of dollars into the organization, it barred its chief, Raed Saleh, from entering the country when he flew to Washington in April 2016 to receive an award for his contributions to “humanitarian relief.” The State Department explained that he had been sent back to Turkey because of suspected “extremist connections.”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact