



February 16, 2014

The Al-Nusra Front recently carried out a suicide bombing attack in Aleppo, using a British foreign fighter. Using foreign fighters for suicide bombing attacks is a widespread Al-Nusra Front modus operandi.



Left: British suicide bomber dressed in white before leaving to carry out a suicide bombing attack (Sada al-Sham al-Islami website, February 15, 2014). Right: Car bomb explosion (video distributed by the Al-Nusra Front).

Overview

1. The Al-Nusra Front, Al-Qaeda's branch in Syria, recently published a video showing a British foreign fighter who carried out a suicide bombing during an attack on a prison in Aleppo. The suicide bombing attack was carried out by means of a truck bomb, a modus operandi used frequently by the Al-Nusra Front. The suicide bomber was a follower of **Sheikh Omar Bakri Muhammad**, a Salafist-jihadi sheikh who used to live in Britain, was subsequently deported by the British authorities and currently resides in Lebanon.
2. Britain is the European country with the largest number of foreign fighters in Syria. Most of them, according to our assessment, joined the ranks of organizations

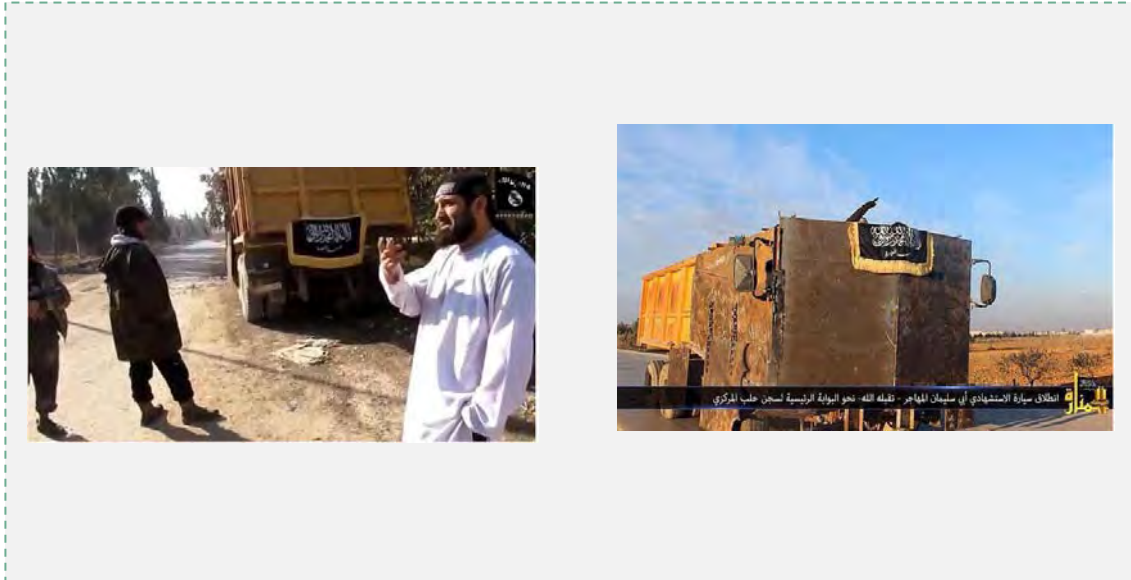
affiliated with Al-Qaeda and the global jihad. According to various estimates, the number of British nationals who left for Syria is around 300, and possibly even more. The Al-Nusra Front's use of a British terrorist and other foreign fighters to carry out suicide bombing attacks is further indication of the threats that countries of origin, including Britain, may face when the jihadi operatives return to their homelands.

Suicide bombing attack in Aleppo

3. **The Al-Nusra Front** recently published a video showing a British fighter **who they say carried out a suicide bombing** during an attack on the prison in Aleppo on February 6, 2014. The British national, **Abdul Waheed Majid**, is seen in the video shortly before he **drove a truck bomb into the prison and blew himself up**. **Abdul Waheed Majid** is reportedly the first British national to carry out a suicide bombing attack in Syria. He apparently belonged to a military framework in the Al-Nusra Front called the Army of the Caliphate (longwarjournal.org, February 14, 2014).

4. According to reports in the British press, **Abdul Waheed Majid**, aka **Abu Suleiman al-Baritani**, was 41 years old, **of Pakistani descent**, married with three children. He lived in the city of Crawley in the County of Sussex. He left Britain some six months ago and went to Syria. He told his family that he was going on a "humanitarian mission" (Note: this is a common cover story among foreign fighters from the West). Before leaving to fight in Syria in the ranks of the Al-Nusra Front, he was a follower of **Omar Bakri Muhammad**, a jihadi Muslim sheikh who was deported from Britain (see below). **Abdul Waheed was a member of Al-Muhajiroun**, Omar Bakri Muhammad's organization in Britain, from the time of its establishment until its closure (between 1996 and 2004)¹ (The Telegraph, The Guardian, February 7, 2014).

¹ For information about the Al-Muhajiroun organization in Britain, see the chapter on [Britain in the Information Center's study from February 2014 about the Western foreign fighters in Syria](#).



Left: Suicide bomber Abdul Waheed Majid standing by the truck bomb before carrying out a suicide bombing attack (Sada al-Sham al-Islami website, February 15, 2014).
Right: The truck bomb (video distributed by the Al-Nusra Front).

5. Abdul Waheed Majid was trained before carrying out the attack by **Yilmaz**, a Dutchman of Turkish descent, who served in the Dutch Army before becoming a radical Muslim. In a recent interview with the Dutch state TV channel, Yilmaz admitted that he was training fighters in Syria. He was also photographed with two British fighters who were killed in Syria in August 2013. He also said that **foreign fighters from Sweden**² also participated in the attack in Aleppo. In a post uploaded to the Internet, he praised the British suicide bomber who, he says, volunteered for the mission in order to liberate the prisoners, in an action that was a “noble sacrifice for a noble cause” (The Daily Mirror, February 9, 2014).

² For information about foreign fighters from Sweden fighting in Syria, see the chapter on [Sweden in the Information Center's study from February 2014 about the Western foreign fighters in Syria.](#)



Left: Yilmaz, the foreign fighter from the Netherlands (The Daily Mirror, February 9, 2014). Right: Yilmaz (center) with two foreign fighters from Britain who were killed in combat in Syria. Left: Muhammad al-A'raj, Right: Shukri al-Khalifi, both of west London, killed in Aleppo on August 11, 2013 (International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation).

6. **Sheikh Omar Bakri Muhammad**, one of whose followers was Abdul Waheed Majid, was interviewed at his home in Tripoli, Lebanon, after the suicide bombing attack. Sheikh Omar Bakri described him as “very dear brother” (The Daily Mirror, February 9, 2014). Sheikh Omar Bakri Muhammad, a Syrian by birth, established the Al-Muhajiroun organization in Britain in 1996. In 2005, he hastily left Britain for Lebanon, for fear of the authorities, who suspected that he was involved in terrorist attacks in Britain. He was forbidden to return to Britain (Wikipedia, MEMRI). A friend of the suicide bomber, **Abu Yahya al-Sham**, wrote in his Twitter page that the suicide bombing attack was carried out in order to liberate his imprisoned brethren in the Aleppo prison and that this was a heroic sacrifice. Another friend of his, **Abu Fulan al-Muhajir**, wrote, “May Allah accept him. All British Muslims should be proud of him. I am, and I'm not even British” (The Telegraph, February 12, 2014).

The foreign fighters' share in the suicide bombing attacks

7. **The use of suicide bombers against the Syrian regime and against Hezbollah is a relatively widespread modus operandi in the war in Syria.** The Al-Nusra Front, Al-Qaeda's branch in Syria, is the rebel organization that has carried out the greatest number of suicide bombing attacks in Syria since the outbreak of the civil war. From the announcement of its establishment in January 2012 until the end of December 2012, the organization claimed responsibility for **43 of the 50 suicide**

bombing attacks carried out against the Assad regime. **In 2013, the Al-Nusra Front carried out 34 suicide bombing attacks.**³

8. **Some 53 suicide bombers** took part in suicide bombing attacks in Syria in 2013. Of the 30 names of suicide bombers that we have identified, **23 are foreigners, mainly from the Arab world.** This indicates that **the use of foreign fighters for suicide bombing attacks is widespread.** However, the use of European foreign fighters in suicide bombing attacks is still rare. As far as we know, participants in suicide bombings in 2013 included a suicide bomber from Australia known as **the Australian Abu Osama**, (aka **Abu Osama al-Muhajir**), who carried out a suicide bombing attack for the Al-Nusra Front (at the entrance to Deir al-Zor airport on September 11, 2013). A foreign terrorist whose country of origin is unknown to us also participated in an Al-Nusra Front suicide bombing attack, and possibly also a terrorist of **Canadian descent** (we are uncertain about his identity and how he died).

Britain as a center for foreign fighters in Europe

9. Of the countries in Europe, Britain has the largest number of foreign fighters in Syria. The ICSR Institute, which monitors foreign fighters traveling to Syria, **estimates the number of Britons at approximately 200-350** (ICSR, October 15, 2013). According to other estimates published recently (December 2013) in the British media, their number totals about **300 and maybe even more.** According to the estimates, to date some 20 British nationals have been killed in combat in Syria.⁴
10. According to the British media, salient among the young British nationals traveling to Syria are those of **Pakistani descent** or members of **North African communities** living in Britain (including Libyan and Tunisian exiles and Moroccans who found refuge in Britain). There is also a community of exiles from Syria in Britain, whose number is estimated at around 13,000, which has become a central support infrastructure for the rebels in Syria (including fundraising and sending both aid and foreign fighters).
11. Most of the British foreign fighters go to Syria via **Turkey**. Most of them do so privately. However, there are also **organized networks** that help British foreign

³ For information about suicide bombing attacks in Syria, see the Information Center's study from February 2014: "[Using Suicide Bombers as Weapons](#)".

⁴ For information about the phenomenon of foreign fighters in general and Britons in particular, see the Information Center's study from February 2014: "[Foreign fighters from Western countries in the ranks of the rebel organizations affiliated with Al-Qaeda and the global jihad in Syria](#)".

fighters get to Syria. These networks recruit foreign fighters and pay for the flight tickets of those who cannot afford them. On their arrival in Turkey, contacts wait for them and take care of getting them into Syria. **We believe that many of the British foreign fighters find their way to the Al-Nusra Front and to other jihadi organizations.**