

PDC UPDATE: INTERNAL REPORT

The following report represents the opinions of leaders and informed persons within Deir ez-Zour.



The current military map of Deir ez-Zour. More than 2,000 fighters waiting for an army to be formed.

Special report:

The international plans to fight the ISIS continues to ignore the province of Deir ez-Zour, despite its major importance to the organization (its oil resources, at least). They ignore the fact that the sons of the province, especially those who stood up to the invasion of the ISIS in the summer of 2014, are the best able to expel the organization from there and the most insistent on that.

The number, distribution and deployment:

According to leaders and informed persons, the number of people carrying arms in Deir ez-Zour is more than 2200, some of them fight in the ranks of large well known factions as Ahrar al-Sham movement and Jaish Al Islam, or in local dependent factions, and some others fight in different small groups. According to the current information, which suggests that a positive change is coming in Deir ez-Zour, it seems that the total number of fighters will increase depending on the circumstances and as the conflict changes with each of the ISIS and the Regime forces. The number may double with the admission of ex-fighters of the FSA, waiting for a serious project that will bring them together in a militarily unified and disciplined body.

Combat goal and affiliation:

According to leaders and informed persons, the objective of combat for the majority of leaders and fighters is to defeat the ISIS and the Regime forces in Deir ez-Zour and then in the rest areas of Syria, and others believe that liberating their cities and villages from the ISIS is the goal. Most of the leaders affirm their adherence and commitment to the principles of the revolution, which is an acceptable assertion due to their previous background in the FSA formations. This assertion can also be accepted even from leaders who have recently joined formations of jihadist nature with non-ideological motivations. However care must be taken, in varying degrees - according to the leader's background before and during the Revolution - of revisions that occur in the ranks of the people of Deir ez-Zour originally belonging to each of Ahrar Al Sham movement and JAN. However, in the event of establishing a unifying and effective military body capable of attracting those from current affiliations, these reviews will be reflected in a practical behavior that comes very close, gradually, from the general national project. The portability of joining the assumed military body by the sons of Deir ez-Zour belonging to Ahrar al-Sham movement differs from their counterparts in JAN. As most of the sons of Deir ez-Zour are expected to leave the movement in case of such a body is established, while the proportion of those who will leave JAN is expected to be less and to vary between the north; where expected numbers are not more than (50-100) fighters, and the south -Deraa- where it is estimated that the majority will leave JAN –which is isolated now- to less stringent trends where it is difficult to determine their ends and the degree of stability in this departure and its potential inflection.

Defects of the international training programs:

According to leaders and informed persons, the first training programs, sponsored by the United States with regional partnerships, faced utter failure due to ignoring al-Assad Regime as an enemy as well, and focusing only on "terrorism" as a phenomenon isolated from its general Syrian context. Internal responses suggest that the resumed programs look better than the previous ones, given the growing numbers of

entrants and of those who are willing to join. They suggest that these programs may meet the highest chances of success if put it in the context of a broader project, in addition to considering two main conditions of admission, namely:

-That the fighters asking to join should not be a previous member of any jihadi salafi factions, considering that a sufficient reason for refusal, regardless the period and originality of that affiliation.

-The fighter should not have any first class kinship with a person belonging to jihadi salafi movement. This is certainly an unfair condition, as how can you hold someone accountable for the deeds of another.

The following table was prepared depending on the statements of some leaders about the number of their fighters, and on the estimates of persons familiar with the mentioned factions. JAN in the south is distinguished from the general body of the Front because of the semi-split state experienced by the sons of Deir ez-Zour belonging to JAN there.

| Faction | Number | Leader | Geographical Spread |
|--|---------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|
| A gathering under process of formation (Force 56 previously) | 300 | Mhedi al Jailah | Northern countryside of Raqqa |
| Osoud Alsharqiyah | 200 | Tias Alsalamah | Eastern Qalamon |
| Jaish al Islam | 200 | Several leaders | Idlib and Aleppo Countryside |
| Aljabhah al Shamiyah-Security office | 150 | - | Aleppo |
| New Syrian Army | 100 | Muhannad Altallaa | Southeast of the Badiat al Sham |
| Faylaq al Sham | 50 | - | Aleppo |
| Jaish al Sham | 50 | - | Aleppo |
| JAN in the north | 300 | Abu Mohammed al-Joulani | Idlib and Aleppo |
| JAN in the south | 200 | Abu Mariya al-Qahtani | Daraa |
| Small fighting groups (10-40 fighter), with no current name of clear affiliation | 350 | - | Idlib and Aleppo |

Ain al Madeenah asked leaders and military figures of the sons of Deir ez-Zour, in their different locations, about the obstacles to a military body project able to take the initiative regarding the battle of liberating Deir ez-Zour from the ISIS, and then from the Regime forces.

They agreed that the different objectives and methods of work of the supporting countries are major causes for this scattering. Everyone expressed their willingness to give up his current factional affiliation, and any position, in favor of unity.

“We show here in the most prominent opinions, we do everything we can for building the unified army of Deir ez-Zour. We in Jaish al Islam will be the first to abandon our faction for that goal, but we cannot join any mysterious project that does not meet the interests of the revolution. I heard of the New Army of Syria from the media and have remarks in this concern, because we cannot

fight in a desert land that we do not know nor control the supply lines in it, but we wish success for our brothers in this army. We stand beside every one fighting the ISIS and the Regime and do not waste the goals of the revolution. Today we are fighting in Idlib and Aleppo, and we are part of Turkey's plan to expel the ISIS of Aleppo, and we hope start the execution and succeed in liberating this land in order to become a starting point for our operations against the organization.”

Salim Al-Khalid (Abu Muhammad): Commander of Deir ez-Zour fighters in Jaish al- Islam, and former commander of Jafar Altayar brigade in the eastern region.

The supporting States, parties and characters (as Ahmad Jarba) play a negative role in the project of a unified free army in the province, which is the main obstacle to this project; in addition to the factional, clan and territorial rivalry. The fighters learned from the painful lesson in Deir ez-Zour more than the leaders, possessed by the desires of control and competition. We haven't joined any of the current projects. We are not a part of the New Syrian army, but we support them and wish them success and we will fight alongside them inevitably as every war against the ISIS and the Regime is ours as well. We are fighting in the eastern Qalamoun against both of the regime and the ISIS and told the fighters that we will not allow any existence of the organization there. We defeated the ISIS in many battles and progressed in the desert areas around Deir ez-Zour, but we retreated later in front of a huge force as we were without support and adequate equipment. We did not feel yet that a particular country is really enthusiastic to help us fight the ISIS.

Tlas Salamah (Abu Faisal): commander of Osoud Alsharqiyah, and the former commander of Bashaer Alnasr brigade and then the Mujahideen Shura Council , formed to fight the ISIS in Deir ez-Zour.

From the side of the fighters, there is no obstacle or significant problem for the unit, but the multiplicity of the supporting parties, their hesitation, different programs, intentions, and goals, are the reasons of delay in the construction of a single military body for Deir ez-Zour. We cannot liberate the province from ISIS and then from the Regime without being in one orderly and disciplined army carrying only the revolution flag. We are ready to give up any name or an existing work in favor of this army, we have learned a harsh lesson in front of the ISIS in Deir ez-Zour, and will not commit a mistake again. We support all who are fighting the ISIS and the regime. We are not part of the "Democratic Forces of Syria" although our fighters are stationed in Tel Abyad, we are there due to an international will.

Mhedi al Jailah (Abu Saleh Alshaiti): Commander of Force 56 and the former leader of Hamzah brigade.

The multiplicity of supporters, the distancing of the elite intellectuals from the military action and the competing leaders are all reasons behind the delay in the unification of Deir ez-Zour fighters. We criticize the new Syrian Army for excluding large segments of the fighters, where some of those who wanted to join it were returned from Jordan because of the difficult conditions the USA. An army built selectively, will not succeed in the liberation of Deir ez-Zour. Despite the current poor conditions endured by everyone, I am optimistic because we began to learn from previous mistakes.

First Lt. Ismail Al-Abdullah (Abu Ishaq): the former commander of Al-Ahwaz brigade, the current commander of a group of Deir ez-Zour fighters in Ahrar al -Sham Movement