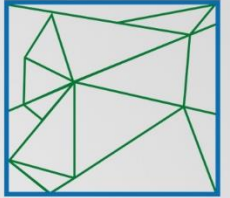


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سوريون
من أجل
الحقيقة
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Syrians
For Truth
& Justice



Dozens of Reconciled Young Men Recruited by a Member of the People's Council of Syria

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Based on the testimonies obtained by Syrians for Truth and Justice/STJ, Hossam al-Katerji, a member of the Syrian People's Council, is recruiting young men who underwent a reconciliation/settlement deal in northern rural Hama under his affiliate armed groups. Al-Katerji is offering the young men high monthly salaries to tempt them; he also promised them that joining his forces is considered a part of the compulsory service in the Syrian Army, in addition to granting them security cards that facilitate their movement within Syria and prevent their arrest.

On November 9, 2018, several of the drivers working for al-Katerji, whom STJ's field researcher in northern rural Homs interviewed, reported that al-Katerji, also a businessman, possesses a fleet of transport and shipping vehicles and that he mainly transports oil between the different Syrian provinces, as he has close relationships with the various sides to the conflict in Syria, including the organization that calls itself the Islamic State/IS, which is also dubbed Daesh.¹ In the past years, he was buying and transporting oil from the different Syrian regions to those controlled by the forces of the Syrian government.

According to several recruits under the al-Katerji militia, his forces have strong ties with the National Defense Militia, collocated with the Syrian regular forces. For several times, his forces have also backed the fronts where the Iranian militias spread, such as those in Daraa and Deir ez-Zor. Al-Katerji provides recruits, drivers and militants, with security cards that protect them from being arrested or blackmailed at the checkpoints, while this recruits' monthly salaries range from \$150 to \$300.

Recruits within the al-Katerji's militias offer protection to the tankers convoys and vehicles loaded with fuel and oil, mainly throughout Syria, most prominently those coming from the al-Omari oil field in Deir ez-Zor and phosphate fields in Homs. At cases, they are summoned to back fronts and conduct raid and arrest operations on behalf of the security services, for hundreds of the militant recruits were transported to participate in the battles that took place in Daraa province.

Concerning the recruitment of young men under the al-Katerji militia in northern rural Homs, a local source, who refused to reveal his name for security considerations, told STJ the following:

"The al-Katerji groups were formed early in 2012. After the reconciliation/settlement deal in northern rural Homs, the former commander, dubbed "Abu Haiyeh", of the Al-Tawhid/Oneness Brigade, affiliated to the armed Syrian opposition, started to recruit the young men who signed the reconciliation deal. Through him, hundreds of rural Hama and Homs' young men were recruited. Lately, Mohammad Aloush Abu Ramez and Abdulsalam Lattouf have been recruiting young men in the al-Rastan city."

¹ The Arabic acronym for ISIS.

On the condition of anonymity, a militant, recruited under the al-Katerji forces, told STJ:

“We were fooled. Before we were recruited, they told us that joining the al-Katerji forces is considered a part of the compulsory military service, for the recruitment period will be reduced from that of the [regular] service, which triggered us with dozens of fellows to volunteer. We thought that protecting the oil tanks is better than moving between the hot fronts. However, the opposite happened. We were pranked, and dozens of the young men were arrested by the Military Police, which told us that the regular Syrian forces have nothing to do with any militias.”

Calling himself Abu Issam, another recruit under the al-katerji forces from the city of al-Rastan, northern rural Homs, said:

“I joined the al-Katerji forces when a friend told me about them and convinced me of volunteering. I am paid 50,000 Syrian pounds, the equivalent to \$100 a month. With this, I ensure my and my family’s safety from the Shabiha’s² vengeance.”

Another recruit, calling himself “Abu Ghadeer” said:

“I volunteered for the al-Katerji forces about two months from the reconciliation/settlement deal. I am paid a monthly salary that equals \$150. Of course, there are militants designated for raids, incursions and medical services; these are paid salaries that might reach \$300. The militants whose job’s focus is the protection of tankers and vehicles get a salary of about \$150.”

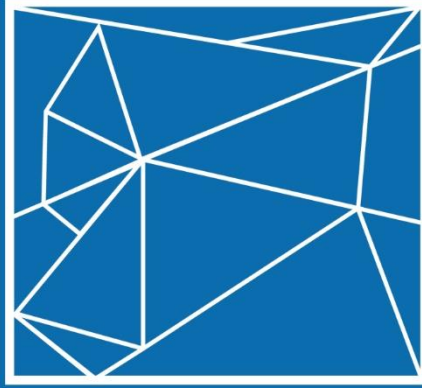
Since the Syrian regular forces and their allies controlled northern rural Homs, many violations of the reconciliation/settlement deal were documented, where governmental institutions refused to rehire the employees they dismissed earlier and dozens of the region’s young men were arrested, detained and summoned for various reasons, some of which are unknown. Some of the young men were released, while the destiny of others is yet unknown. Covering these incidents, STJ published several detailed news reports.³

² The expression used to refer to the Syrian government’s armed thugs.

³ “Syria: National Security Bureau Summons Officer Defectors in Northern Rural Homs prior to their Discharge”, Syrians for Truth and Justice, November 6, 2018, (Last visit: January 26, 2019). <https://stj-sy.com/ar/view/937>.

“Ongoing Arrests against Former White Helmets in Homs and Daraa”, Syrians for Truth and Justice, September 15, 2018, (Last visit: January 26, 2019). <https://stj-sy.com/en/view/744>.

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About Syrians for Truth and Justice:

STJ is an independent, nongovernmental organization whose members include Syrian human rights defenders, advocates and academics of different backgrounds and nationalities.

The initiative strives for SYRIA, where all Syrian citizens (females and males) have dignity, equality, justice and equal human rights.

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✉ editor@stj-sy.org