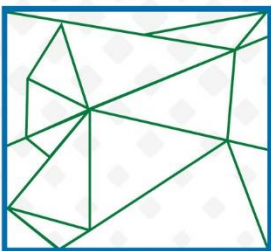


Ukraine/Syria: New Details About 1000 Fighters Recruited by Armed Opposition Groups



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The Sultan Murad Division, affiliated with the Syrian National Army (SNA), equipped hundreds of highly practiced fighters, preparing them to fight in Ukraine under 6-month mercenary contracts

On 4 March 2022, Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) published a [report](#) verifying information about individual initiatives from fighters and commanders within the factions of the opposition's Syrian National Army (SNA), who are planning to fight beside the Ukrainian forces in their war against the Russian forces.

In this report, STJ reports new information which confirms that several armed opposition groups, notably the Sultan Murad Division, led by Commander Fahim Issa, registered the names of hundreds of fighters who applied to partake in combat in Ukraine.

For the purposes of this report, STJ interviewed three of the registered fighters and a first-class commander of one of the factions from the SNA's First Legion. The commander stressed that between 900 and 1000 names had already been registered without final approval from Turkey to start the transfers to Ukraine, especially since the recruits are all experienced fighters.

Turkey's Stance on Recruitments

Since the beginning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Turkish authorities firmly emphasized they were adopting a "middle ground" position. Pursuant to a "middle ground" position, Turkish authorities informed the commanders of several armed opposition groups that they would not officially sponsor or finance the deployment of fighters to Ukraine.

Despite this firm initial stance, Turkish authorities were aware that commanders of several factions commenced with the registrations and did not protest the recruitments underway, which so far amount to approximately 1000 potential fighters, all to be deployed to Ukraine.

To obtain additional information on Turkey's role in the recruitments, in mid-March 2022, STJ reached out to a first-class officer of one of the factions from the SNA's First Legion, who maintains tight relations with the Turkish authorities and their forces who are presently stationed in Syria. The officer recounted:

"The Turks know that the factions are registering the names of fighters. Some factions received indirect Turkish orders to attract fighters with experience in heavy weapons in the first phase. Additionally, there has been some talk that for now 1300 fighters are needed, who will be divided into groups, each consisting of 210 fighters. These will be transferred sometime later."

The officer added:

"There are no flights for now, nor a specific date for transporting the fighter. The Turks have not yet totally approved or decisively refused [the recruitments], the issue is still under discussion. We learned that some European countries will handle the transfers, but Turkey will still supervise the fighters."

For their part, the registered fighters have been circulating information that the Ukrainian government will pay them their monthly salaries, which amount to 1200 USD per month for the duration of a 6-month fighting mission (contract). Additionally, the three fighters interviewed by STJ reported that the Ukrainian authorities will pay the money to Turkey, who would then provide the sums as grants to the SNA factions.

Details About the Registrations, Conditions, and Benefits

On the issue of fighter registrations, STJ reached out to three fighters who registered their names in March 2022, all wishing to join the fight in Ukraine. The fighters registered their names in the areas of Azaz, Shaykh al-Hadid, and Afrin city and within the ranks of the Sultan Murad Division, Liwa 213/ 213th Division and the Third Legion respectively. In this section, STJ provides the full accounts of the sources.

Registered in Azaz city, the first source narrated:

“In early March, I registered my name within the ranks of the Third Legion at the office of a person called Sirajeddin al-Omar. He told me that in addition to fighters, they are contracting war journalists to accompany the Syrian opposition fighters to Ukraine. I filled in the application, which covered my personal information, samples of my work in coverage of battles, my combat expertise, and the type of weapon I know how to use.”

He added:

“They also told me that there is a grant for war reporters, presented by a European government that is highly involved in the Syrian conflict. No one has provided me with details about the remuneration yet.”

The second source is an Afrin-based fighter from an opposition faction, who previously fought in Libya. He recounted:

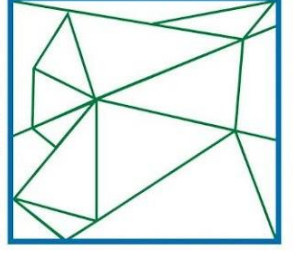
“The registration started over the first week of March, with Lieutenant Urabah Idris, commander of 213th Division and the nephew of Salim Idris, former defense minister of the Opposition’s Syrian Interim Government. He did not ask for many documents, because I fought in Libya before. He told me that the salary is 1200 USD and that the mission is for 6 months. The departure date has not yet been fixed.”

The third source is based in Shaykh al-Hadid and a fighter from an opposition faction, who previously fought in Libya. He recounted:

“The registration started in early March, with the official of the Fighter Affairs Department at the Sultan Murad Division, Muhamad Abu Ahmad Nour. They told us that the transfer is in two weeks. There was a big turnout on registrations from young men, especially after Suhail Abu Tow posted that he communicated with the Ukrainian embassy.”

He added:

“Only those who have experience in the use of heavy weapons, or who formerly engaged in fighting, are allowed to register their names. I filled the application and wrote my combat expertise, the places where I fought, and the names of the commanders I fought for, as well as the type of weapon I efficiently use, and whether I fought in Azerbaijan or Libya. Additionally, they asked for a certificate of good conduct and the names of two commanders as references.”



About Us:

Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) is a nonprofit, nongovernmental organization monitoring human rights violations in Syria. Founded in 2015, STJ has been based in France since 2019.

STJ is an impartial and independent Syrian human rights organization operating across Syria. Our network of field researchers monitor and report human rights violations occurring on the ground in Syria, while our international team of human rights experts, lawyers, and journalists gather evidence, examine emerging patterns of violations, and analyze how violations break domestic Syrian and international law.

We are committed to documenting violations of human rights committed by all parties in the Syrian conflict and elevating the voices of all Syrians victimized by human rights violations, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, political affiliation, class, and/or gender. Our commitment to human rights monitoring is founded on the idea that professional human rights documentation meeting international standards is the first step to uncovering the truth and achieving justice in Syria.



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EDITOR@STJ-SY.ORG