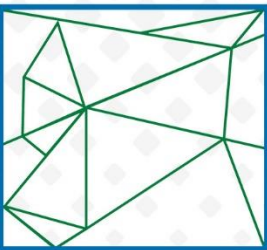


Has the Recruitment of Syrian Fighters Towards Ukraine Begun?



سوريون
من أجل
الحقيقة
والعدالة
Syrians
For Truth
& Justice



04 March 2022

Syria: Has the Recruitment of Syrian Fighters Towards Ukraine Begun?

*Russian officers asked Syrian security services to register the
names of practiced urban warfare fighters, while armed
opposition groups started to collect names to back Ukraine
without official Turkish endorsement*

With the start of the Russian invasion into Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the Syrian mainstream witnessed a split of opinion: some advocated the Russian military operations, others decried the hostilities, while the rest stood on the sidelines and opted for neutrality.

A similar split marked the Syrian military circles; however, it was also marked with widespread news about the potential recruitment and deployment of Syrian fighters to partake in combat beside either of the warring parties.

In Ukraine, calls for participation in the combat have been launched on an official level. On 28 February 2022, [The Kyiv Independent](#) reported that the [Ukrainian President](#) Volodymyr Zelensky had ordered the temporary lifting of the visa for foreign fighters wishing to back Ukrainian forces. In the United Kingdom, Foreign Secretary Liz Truss [said](#) on 27 February 2022 she supported individuals from the UK who might want to go to Ukraine to fight, and Denmark's Prime Minister [claimed](#) that there is currently no legal prohibition for Denmark's citizens to participate in the conflict on the Ukrainian side.

With the rising national and international calls for mobilization, there have been reports that Syrian government-affiliated security services and several Turkey-backed opposition armed groups have opened the enlistment door for Syrian fighters who wish to register to fight on either side of the clashing armies in Ukraine. Simultaneously, several individual opposition fighters, including locally recognized ones, took to their social media accounts and declared their intentions to fight in Ukraine.

To corroborate these rumors, Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) reached out to several sources from within the Syrian government (SG) forces and the factions of the opposition Syrian National Army (SNA).

Lists Soon to Be Presented to Russian Security Companies

To verify news about the SG forces-led preparations for recruitments, STJ interviewed two sources based in Damascus' countryside. The first source is a fighter who registered his name with the SG security services to travel to Ukraine and fight alongside the Russian forces. The second source is a local official from one of the SG-established Reconciliation Committees. Both sources confirmed that lists with potential recruits' names are being compiled to be presented to the Russian forces stationed in Syria for approval, with the intention of deploying them to Ukraine.

Notably, the two sources were extremely cautious about their identities, refusing to reveal their names for security concerns.

The first source is a young man who recently completed his mandatory and reserve military service terms with the Syrian army. He applied to join Russian forces in Ukraine. STJ interviewed the source on 28 February and cites his full testimony here:

"I was decommissioned from the reserve military service a while ago. There are massive challenges, related to living conditions. After I was demobilized, I could not find any jobs and the situation is extremely dire. There is no electricity, heating, or household gas. And then, by sheer coincidence, I heard that names of those willing to fight in Ukraine are being registered. The registration was mediated by the reconciliation official in the area where I live. The official was talking about the matter with the area's

mukhtar (governor). When they finished talking, I approached the reconciliation official and asked him to help me register my name. He did. The man communicated with an assistant surgeon in the Air Force Intelligence Branch in Harasta, Damascus countryside. I referred to the branch on 27 February.”

He added:

“I went into the office of the assistant surgeon. He registered my data — name, military details about me and about the places where I fought previously, whether I fought under the command of Russian officers before, and more additional information. Then, the assistant surgeon told me that should I be approved to travel, I must pay him 200,000 Syrian Pounds (SYP) in return for registering my name as an *ikramiyeh* (a candied alternative for the word bribe).”

He concluded:

“The assistant surgeon did not tell me about the financial compensation, or the monthly salary. He told me that he was working as a coordinator with a Russian security company. He said that, within the upcoming days, he will inform of the results of the security check-up of my file and that he will contact me if I am approved. I asked him whether they would register other people who are willing to fight in Ukraine. He told me that they were registering only fighters with good military experience and that the priority was for persons who had formerly fought under the charge of Russian officers or within the ranks of the 25th Division of the Syrian army.”

The second source is an official in one of the local reconciliation committees in an area in Rif Dimashq (Damascus Countryside) province. STJ interviewed the source on 28 February and cites his full testimony here:

“I was at the Air Force Intelligence Branch to help a number of wanted persons surrender themselves and obtain a pardon in return. There, one officer started talking in front me, saying that they will prepare lists with the names of fighters who have sufficient combat experience. These fighters will be subjected to a small-scale training by Russian officers in preparation for sending them to Russia and transporting them to fight in Ukraine with the Russian side.”

He added:

“This Syrian officer quoted Russian officers as saying that there are large numbers of Russian, Belarusians, and also Chechens and that the participation of Syrians is only symbolic and a gesture of loyalty to Russia. Additionally, the officer said that should the combat shift into urban warfare, then Syrians would be considered because they are well-practiced. The Russian officer said that it is prohibited to send inexperienced persons.”

He concluded:

“The process is still in its early stages, the stage of registration. Russians will decide whether to send those who registered, or not, after they have been trained by Russian officers for a while. Maybe they will not be sent at all. . . No one knows for sure. As for the salaries and incentives, no one mentioned anything about these issues.”

Turkey Is Unwilling to Deploy Syrians to Ukraine

In opposition-held areas, particularly those under the Turkish military influence, there has been a flood of rumors that Turkish authorities ordered the SNA factions, especially Turkman sub-groups, to prepare fighters to send them to participate in combat alongside the Ukrainian forces. Other rumors are circulating in the area, claiming that some factions are already in the process of registering the names of fighters.

However, these rumors contradict the statements made by the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. While Erdoğan praised “the struggle of Ukraine's government and people” and called “Russia's attack on Ukraine unacceptable,” he stated that Turkey “cannot abandon its ties with Russia or Ukraine.” He claimed that “Turkey would make no concessions from our national interests; however, we will not disregard the regional and global balances, either.”

These statements were reflected in the orders the Turkish authorities delivered to the factions of the SNA, stressing that Turkey is unwilling to send fighters to partake in combat beside Ukraine officially, the way they did in Libya and Azerbaijan.

Turkey has been firm on the matter and the directives sent to several commanders of armed opposition groups clearly indicate that Turkey will not officially sponsor or finance the deployment of any fighter to Ukraine. However, fighters are already being registered to be sent to Ukraine, through initiatives led by some faction commanders or individuals.

STJ interviewed a first-class officer from one of the SNA factions. He refuted the allegations that the Turkish intelligence service had held extensive meetings with the SNA commanders regarding the deployment of fighters to Ukraine. STJ herein cites his full testimony:

“The officers of the Turkish intelligence service did not ask us to register the names of fighters to be sent to Ukraine, not in any of the meetings. This did not happen. Rumors have been spreading that this was asked of the three Turkmen divisions within the SNA, saying that they have been informed to collect names. This is untrue. I have verified this personally. Abu Amsa (Muhammad al-Jasim) also assured me that these rumors are groundless.”

Commenting on the registrations that are underway, the source narrated:

“Currently, there are registrations in the Turkey-controlled areas. These registrations have been initiated based on the factions' desire to fight the Russians, and this has been explicitly expressed during a meeting between the Turkish intelligence service and second-class commanders. The commanders asked for permission to travel and fight in Ukraine. However, the Turks were clear that they will not send experts from the Turkish army to fight in Ukraine and that Turkey is keeping equal distance from the Ukrainians and the Russians. They added that Bayraktar Mini UAVs are an old deal and that they are presently operated by Ukrainians, not Turkish specialists.”

He concluded:

“During that meeting, the Turks said that they will channel the commanders' demands to authorities in Ankara. They also stressed that should these demands be approved, the approval would only mean authorizations to use Turkish airports and facilitation of travel proceedings. And that money should not be expected from the Turkish side, nor

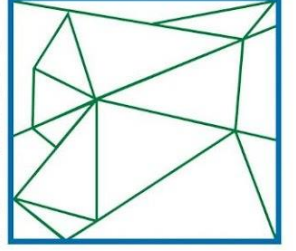
any commitments from the Turkish authorities. Of course, this decision applies only to the current period and everything might change later.”

STJ also interviewed a fighter within a faction from the SNA's First Legion. He registered his name to fight in Ukraine; however, not with his faction, but with a sub-group led by a commander from the Sultan Murad Division, which operates under the charge of Fahim Issa. STJ herein cites his full testimony:

“I have fought once outside Syria, in Azerbaijan. I learned about the registrations from a WhatsApp group. The registration was not carried out by the faction I am a member of, but it is mediated by a person called Abu Kassim. He is one of the security officers within the Sultan Murad Division, with whom I fought in Azerbaijan. They registered my name, took my data, and a copy of my ID, which is issued in northern Syria. I have no additional details, such as the financial compensation or related matters . . . my true intention is to reach Europe after entering Poland.”

Monitoring individual initiatives, STJ documented that a fighter within the al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division, known as Suhail Abu Tow/Suhail al-Hamoud posted several [tweets](#) in English on 25 February 2022. He was asking for available routes to Ukraine, to fight next to the Ukrainian forces against the Russian army.

Al-Hamoud appeared in an interview with [Syria TV](#) on 01 March, during which he confirmed his intention to fight with the Ukraine forces. He said that he is already communicating and coordinating with the Ukrainian embassy to travel there.



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.



WWW.STJ-SY.ORG



[STJ_SYRIA_ENG](https://twitter.com/STJ_SYRIA_ENG)



EDITOR@STJ-SY.ORG