

Cities in Revolution

Deir ez-Zor

A Suspension Bridge:
Transformations of the City

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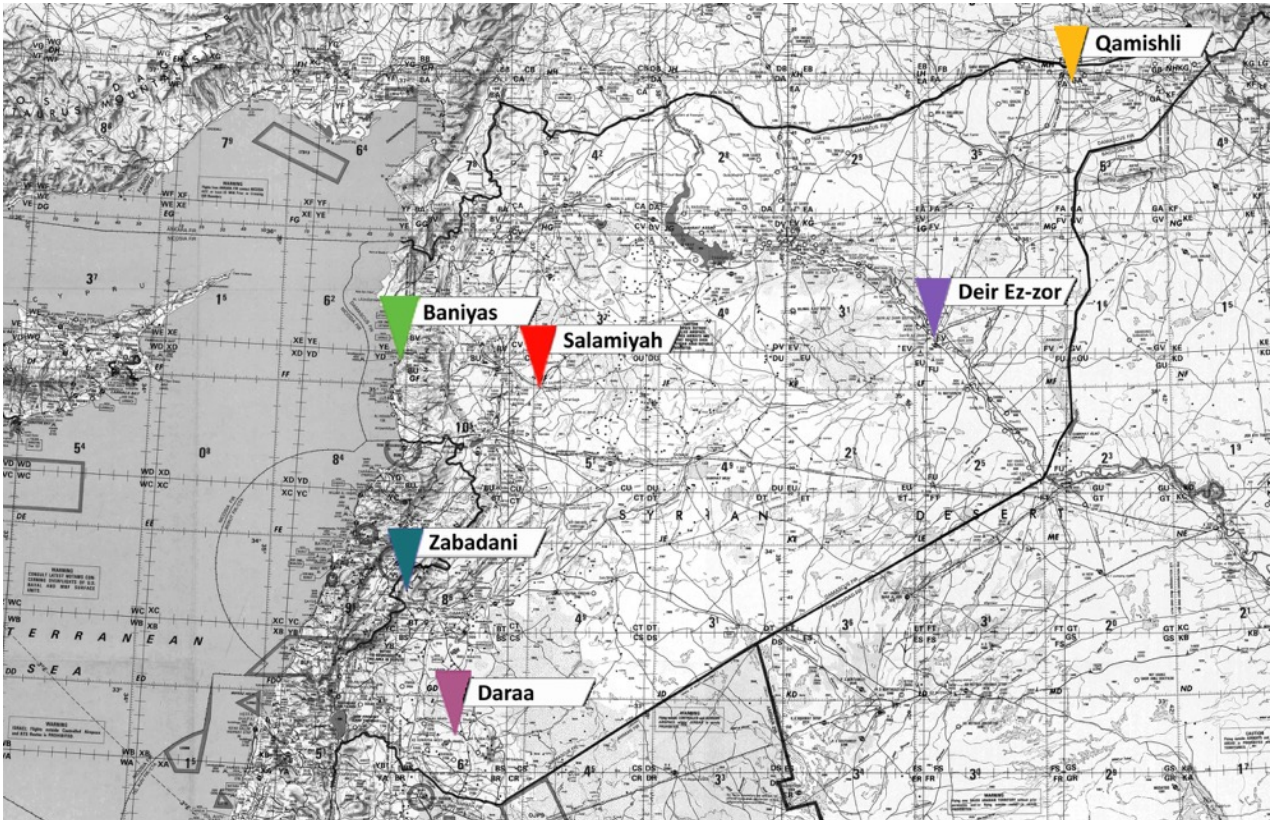
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Introduction



Situated in Eastern Syria, Deir ez-Zor extends to 33.6 thousand square kilometres, making it 17.9% of Syria. According to the last statistics in 2007, it is home to 1.9 million people. The Euphrates river splits the city in two: to the left is the Syrian Steppe and to the right is the Jazira. According to Syrian researcher, Dr. Jamal Barout, the current city of Deir ez-Zor dates

back to 1865 in a deal struck between Ottoman reformists and Sultan Abdul Aziz, who had ascended to the throne in 1861.¹

However, Deir ez-Zor has historically been occupied since the Seleucid era (312 B.C. - 64 B.C.), when it was just a small town along the Euphrates.

Deir ez-Zor has a tribal nature: groups of tribes settled along the banks of the river and turned to agriculture, trade, and shepherding. The notable tribes that settled in the area include: tribes of Albu Saraya and Albu Khabur, Albu Layl; and the Baggara tribe of Deir ez-Zor which includes a number of smaller tribes and clans such as: the Abeed clan and the Abaad clan. To this day, the tribal structure features strongly in the social relations of the city.

In 1919, parts of Deir ez-Zor fell to British occupation, who at the time had established the Iraq Mandate due to their annexation by King Faisal. However, in 1921 the French colonial forces took over the city.

During modern times, Deir ez-Zor was discovered to have large underground reserves of natural gas and oil. This impacted the people of the province greatly, disrupting their social networks and economic activities.

During the 2011 uprising, Deir ez-Zor was one of the first cities to protest against the regime. It participated in demonstrations on March 25, 2011 and the revolutionary movement in the city grew larger than event hat of Hama, which is situated in central Syria. Deir ez-Zor saw a number of “million man marches” against the Asad regime, signalling its momentum in the city.

Deir ez-Zor experienced the rise of the revolutionary movement similarly to other cities in Syria: rising up against Asad’s rule gradually until peaceful

¹ Dr. Jamal Barout, “The Historical Formation of the Syrian Jazira”; the Arab Centre for Research and Policy Studies; Beirut, November 2013. P 68.

protests turned into political action and armed struggle. Like other Syrian cities, Deir ez-Zor saw the rise of the Free Syrian Army and eventually the rise of Islamist groups as well, to the ruse of Jabhat al-Nusra in 2013 which soon gave way to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in 2014. Eventually, this group would dominate most of Deir ez-Zor until even now.

The city underwent various major transformations during the past few years and was subjected to systemic destruction by Asad forces and ISIL, displacing the area's residents to other parts of Syria and eventually the rest of the world.

This study hopes to explore the transformations that have occurred in Deir ez-Zor, which highlighting the revolutionary processes in the city. This study also hopes to present the city's revolutionary narrative, representing all the citizens from children to the elderly, all of whom have played a major role in the revolutionary activities of the city.

In our quest for accuracy in presenting the following events and stories, we have attempted to avoid omissions. The work remains incomplete, and the team looks forward to hearing from readers on how it can be improved.

Chapter One: The Fall of the Regime and its Idols

Deir ez-Zor today resembles other Syrian cities that have dared to rise against tyranny: destroyed and dismembered. A city that refused to replace one tyrant with another, Deir ez-Zor has been terrorised by ISIL and the regime. The residents of the city view them as two sides of the same coin. While the city remains dedicated to the revolutionary slogans that once gripped its people with fervour, it appears that the rest of the world is content to watch them be slaughtered silently.

As with all the cities of the Syrian uprising, the story of Deir ez-Zor goes back to the first few weeks of the popular protests that ran through the country.

Though its story remains similar to others, Deir ez-Zor is distinguished and characterised by its activists² who still view the city with longing and nostalgia, who worked the most towards emancipation when they heard their countrymen's voices shaking with righteousness across the plains.

The First Groups and What Came Before

Deir ez-Zor was deeply moved by what transpired during Egypt and Tunisia's revolutions: for weeks leading up to the start of the uprising in mid-March 2011, dozens of slogans criticising the Asad regime appeared on the city's walls according to activist Mohamad Hamed.³ Security forces would rush to clear the slogans and the security presence on the streets was increased in anticipation of "suspicious" activities by the city's youth.

After a soccer match between the local team in Deir ez-Zor, Al-Fotuwa SC, and Latakia, Tishreen SC, a number of participants rose up with anger:

²The following testimonies were obtained by the research team from activists who were involved in the city's revolutionary movement. When possible, the names of the activists will be cited in the text.

³Interview. January 2016.

they burst out of the stadium, chanting against the regime, burning a car belonging to the security forces and a number of shops. The city’s activists, at the time, viewed this event as not a response to the results of the football game and football riots but rather was a direct reaction to challenge the security forces, something that would not have happened had they not seen what had happened Egypt and Tunisia months prior.

On the second Monday of March 2011, a few days before the first protest in Deir ez-Zor city, a group of young men gathered together to plan the first protest of Deir ez-Zor. They agreed to gather in the downtown market courtyard, which was later named ‘Liberty Square’. They invited more than 200 people through word of mouth to participate in the demonstrations. However, on the day of the protest, nobody showed up according to Thaer al-Furati⁴ thus the protest failed.



On March 25, 2011 the first demonstration in the city occurred, with protests starting at Othman Bin Affan Mosque following noon prayers. The protest started when a member of the youth shouted, “God is Great: Freedom!” and later was joined by dozens. Crowds of demonstrators called for freedom using their loudest voices, chanting “Where are you, my brother?” urging people to join in protest. The protest was composed of 70 people.⁵

⁴ Interview, January 2015. The name is a pseudonym.

⁵ Video purporting to show the demonstrations on March 25, 2011 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7qy4uQUt-KxU>

Leaving the mosque, the protestors walked away from Othman Bin Affan Mosque towards the street, near Ghassan Aboud Circle. As they got closer to the city's centre, they were met by a counter demonstration led by **Shabiha**, chanting in support of Asad, carrying his pictures and pictures of his father. The revolutionary protestors changed their path out of fear of clashes. The counter-protest was led by the President of the Student's Union in Deir ez-Zor, Abdulrazzaq Jarbou', a prominent **shabih**. Due to the heavy security presence, the protestors were beaten and some detained. As a result, the protest was unable to reach all the predetermined spots, al-Furati tells us. Someone from the protest at Othman Bin Affan was able to relay the tragic news to protestors waiting at Safa mosque.

As with other Syrian cities, the activists in Deir ez-Zor planned activists around the Friday prayers, a natural gathering point for the residents of the city. While protests would start after the end of Friday prayers, many of the mosques has not officially joined the uprising. According to the activists, many of the mosque's clerics and worshippers reacted aggressively to their transformation from a site of prayer to a site of protest. In al-Jabileh neighbourhood at the Rawda mosque, some worshippers beat and insulted several protestors who had yelled "freedom" after the end of prayer and expelled them from the mosque. According to al-Furati, these scenario also played out in al-Safa mosque, in the 'Amel neighbourhood, where the doctor and Deir resident, Hussein al-Ghathwan, requested the mosque's preacher to discuss the regime's problems and brutality regarding the peaceful protestors which prompted a group of people, including the preacher, to beat al-Ghathwan. As a result of this, six young men were arrested, two of whom later died in detention.

The activists of Deir ez-Zor planned a second protest for the start of April 2011.⁶ They returned to Othman Bin Affan mosque but were unable to

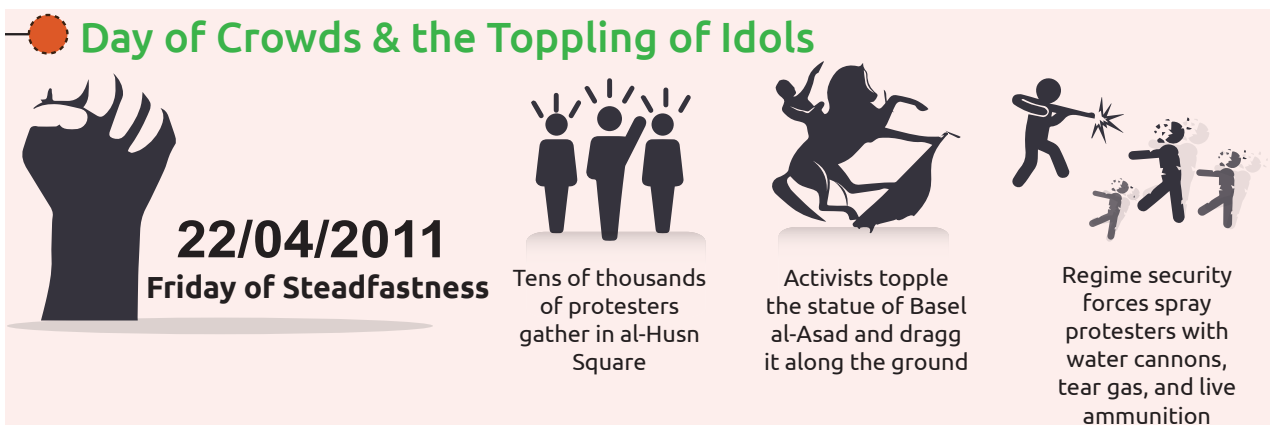
⁶ The Second protest of Deir ez-Zor, April 1 2011 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qst3aYpnK0I>

properly protest due to the heavy security presence, who were waiting for the demonstrators. This forced the activists to regroup and change the location of the protest to Mufti mosque, near the Port Said neighbourhood. There the activists were also attacked by the security forces with sticks and batons.

Concurrently, a group of youths in the al-Joureh neighbourhood also started a protest. Unfortunately, they were unable to get very far as they were immediately stopped by security forces, prompting many to flee in order to avoid arrest.

Crowds and the Toppling of Idols

April 22, 2011 was titled “Friday of Steadfastness” by activists⁷. All over the country, tens of thousands of people flocked to the streets. In Deir ez-Zor, people started chanting for the fall of the regime for the first time. This day was seen as exhilarating: for the first time, protestors felt as though their chanting was louder than the regime’s enforced silence and fear that had clouded their lives for three decades.



Al-Furati says that day was more or less spontaneous, though the activists had planned various meeting points at specific areas such as Othman Bin Affan mosque, al-Toubah mosque in al-Joureh, al-Muwathafeen, and

⁷ The crowd of protestors in Deir ez-Zor on April 22 2011: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A40g1_ZT3_M

Hamidiyeh. The security forces of the city concentrated their presence near three mosques: Othman Bin Affan, al-Toubah and Musaab Bin Omar.

At Othman Bin Affan Mosque, thousands of activists gathered despite the heavy security presence. Their large presence forced the security presence to be wary, prompting a young activist to warn the security forces to step back. Due to the sheer number of people, the security forces complied.

The number of protestors kept increasing by the minute, with protestors traversing the city to meet at Othman Bin Affan mosque. At one point, the number of protestors reached 5,000, coming from all over the city.⁸

The protestors moved towards the main street of the city, where they were met by security forces who sought to block the protestors from moving. The security forces, however, were not expecting such large crowds and fled. Protestors joined the main demonstration through the various feeder streets that opened up to the main streets by Ghassan Aboud. The protestors marched throughout the city, yelling for freedom. Eventually, the protestors reached the public square that housed a statue of Bashar al-Asad's late brother, Basil al-Asad atop a horse.⁹

This square, which was later renamed Freedom Square, was a gathering point for thousands of demonstrators from all over the city and the nearby suburbs. There were tens of thousands of protestors, filling three streets around the square in their entirety. It was there at the protestors, for the first time, demanded the fall of the regime. Security forces looked on as this chant reverberated throughout the city, powerless.

Rami Abu Zine El Abdine, an activist, said¹⁰ that while the protestors were chanting the security forces called for reinforcements in order to disperse

⁸ Video purporting to show protestors from all of the city arriving at Othman Bin Affan Mosque <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NQC9N-kPR64>

⁹ Protestors reaching "Horse Square" on April 22 2011 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=baD21ZEhQ4>

¹⁰ Interview conducted with the activist (pseudonym) in January 2015

the protestors by force. A fire truck was brought in, to spray down the protestors with intense jets of water. Tear gas was fired. In response, protestors threw rocks at the security forces, forcing them to retreat, lighting a security car on fire, and using the hoses of water to tear down the Basil al-Asad statue to the ground.¹¹

One of the most important symbols of tyranny fell in the city that day, while the protestors throats were rubbed raw from shouts of emancipation and victory. Fear fell away from the hearts of the protestors as the statue toppled.

This caused the security forces to react with increased strength: they brought in more soldiers who shot at the protestors with live ammunition, according to the activists, and tear gas, and used armoured military vehicles to break up the demonstrations long after the imposed curfew.

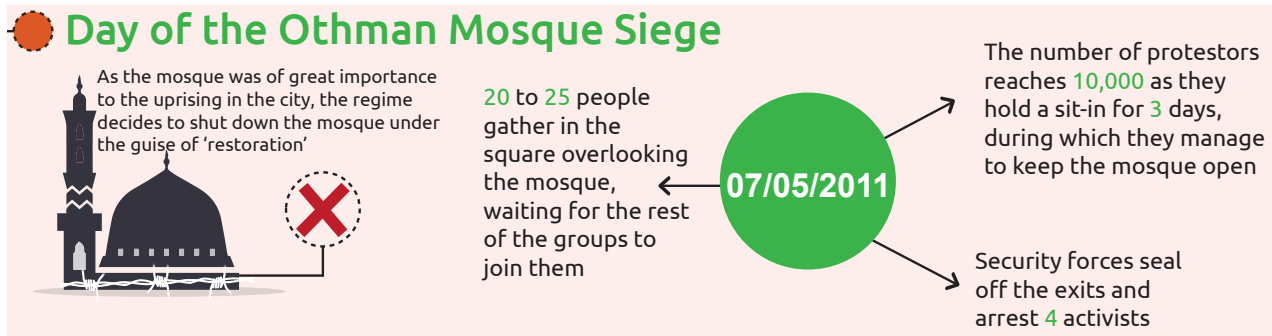
The Siege of Othman Mosque

Othman Bin Affan mosque is located in the Old Airport neighbourhood. After the start of the uprising it was transformed into one of the main hotbeds of revolutionary activity in Deir ez-Zor. It acted as a type of incubator for all movement in the city, according to al-Furati. Activists fled to the houses near the mosque for safety and the residents of the neighbourhood did not allow the security forces to search their homes.

As a result, the city's authorities closed the mosque under the pretext of 'restoration.' Jaame' Jaame' was the driver behind the decision, a representation of the highest security forces in the city. The mosque, and most of the roads leading to it, were closed.

A few days following the mosque's closure, a number of activists decided to break the blockade imposed on the mosque, to start protests once again. The residents of the neighbourhood did not agree with this plan of action, however groups from other areas joined the call for the sit in.

¹¹Video showing the toppling of the statute April 22 2011 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c4Ybl66-Fzo>



On May 7, 2011 20 to 25 activists met in the square overlooking the mosque, awaiting the rest of the groups who had responded to the sit-in's call. The regime's intelligence forces, however, had gotten word of the activists' plans: they mobilised hundreds of security agents to prevent the gathering. These agents blocked off most of the access to the roads. Activists, however, were able to break through the blockade through forgotten side streets and as a result, four activists were arrested. Their arrest led to popular anger, which led to an influx of protestors joining the activists in the square. Estimates put the number of protestors that night at around 10,000.¹²

Due to the large number of protestors, the security forces were pushed to negotiate with the demonstrators, who insisted on the release of all detainees as a condition for negotiations. The negotiations failed, and the sit in continued for a second day. On the third day, the security forces had called for many more reinforcements. They opened live fire at the protestors in order to break up the sit-in, but not before the provincial government agencies agreed to reopen the mosque and end the blockade.



Martyrs and the Revolutionary Transformation

The blocked on Othman Bin Affan mosque had a huge impact on the city: there was an increase of evening demonstrations and sit-ins, and the number of security forces within the city and near the mosque also increased. In radical neighbourhoods, activists organised new forms of revolutionary actions such as the "fly-by protests" in which a small number of activists would protest in high-risk, high-security areas in order to provoke the security forces, causing an inconvenience to them, and to let

¹² Evening sit in at Othman Bin Affan mosque on May 7 2011 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MF84Ws8Jwfo>

everyone know that the activists were still thriving and planning despite the heavy security presence.

On June 3, 2011, activists dubbed that Friday the Friday of Freedom's Children¹³, large protests occurred in the city similar to previous ones with the exception of one crucial detail: the death of the first martyr, a 15-year old named Muaz al-Rakd.¹⁴

	<p>Large protests erupt, and the first martyr: falls Muaz al-Rakd, age 15</p>	<p>15/06/2011 Thousands of people take to the streets for al-Rakd's funeral, with the protesters heading to Freedom Square, where they are met by security forces who open fire on them</p>	
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According to eyewitnesses and video footage, al-Rakd was participating in the protests that had started in al-Joureh, when he was struck in the leg by a bullet. He collapsed and within moments, security forces had arrested him and prevented his comrades from accessing him to help him due to his injury. He was beaten to death using the rifle butts and batons of the security forces.

The security forces kidnapped al-Rakd's corpse in an attempt to blackmail his family, stating the body would only be handed over if they signed a confession stating their son was killed by terrorists. Al-Furati said al-Rakd's uncle, however, refused to do so. In response, massive demonstrations all over the city demanded the security agency to turn the boy's body over to his family.

On the 5th of the same month,¹⁵ thousands of people took to the streets in a funerary protest. Mourners filled the city streets and chanted against the security forces of the Asad regime. They buried al-Rakd in a cemetery

¹³ A protest in Deir ez-Zor on Friday of Freedom's Children <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zCCM9gOBdrU>

¹⁴ The death of Muaz al-Rakd on June 3 2011 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XTbHaABOrmk>

¹⁵ Mu'az al-Rakd's funeral, June 5 2011 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y6SkwW_f0oI

dubbed, “Freedom’s Cemetery” which was a make-shift plot of land used to bury the uprising’s martyrs.

Following the burial, tens of thousands of angry demonstrators took to the streets towards Freedom Square. The regime’s security forces opened fire and tear gas on the protestors. On that summer day, two young men were killed by gunfire: Abdelmone’im Hasban and Mohamad al-Sayeh.¹⁶

The next day, thousands of people took to the streets of Deir ez-Zor in anger for the funeral of the two young men. The atmosphere was marked by anger and grief over the loss of life and it was apparent that the city’s revolutionary movement was shifting.

Liberation

After the fall of the city’s first martyrs in June 2011, the revolutionary movement in the city intensified. Demonstrations began to erupt every day and night on the streets. The security forces increased their violent response to these protests, and more people died. The violent confrontations pushed the activists to be more fervent in their political expression.¹⁷

Late June saw massive demonstrations in Deir ez-Zor, featuring tens of thousands of demonstrators. On the Friday of “Fallen Legitimacy”, June 24 2011, demonstrations raged in downtown Deir ez-Zor until late in the day.¹⁸ The protests eventually turned into festivals, with protestors dancing, and singing, and coming together using all peaceful means to demand their rights, ideas and their desire for freedom.¹⁹ Protests across the country continued to grow, until they reached their peak: on July 22, 2011, more

¹⁶ Funerary protest for Abdelmone’im Hashban and Mohamad al-Sayeh

¹⁷ Protest in Deir ez-Zor on July 22 2011 <http://www.syrrevnews.com/archives/2677>

¹⁸ Protest in Deir ez-Zor on June 28 2011 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5xdC2wFEyU4>

¹⁹ Protest in Deir ez-Zor on June 22 2011 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M8SDi-q8Mig>



than a million protestors flocked to Hama in the largest protest in the history of the uprising.

That protest proved to be a catalyst: prior to this large show of defiance, the security and intelligence forces had attempted to contain the uprising using kid gloves, arresting activists, launching tear gas at the demonstrators, or organising counter-demonstrations.

But it did not work: in the period between the end of March to July 2011, the popular movement continued to grow signalling the regime's loss of control. According to activist Ali Farhan²⁰, "the protests spread to most of the city's neighbourhood. Over 550,000 people attended the protests which were characterised by an almost complete lack of security personnel. The people of the city took responsibility for the management of public life. However, the army then sent in tanks and soldiers to recapture the city and end this peaceful movement, calling in reinforcements from Aleppo and Damascus."²¹

Eventually, the practice of leaving protestors alone shifted not just in Deir ez-Zor but in the rest of the country; live fire was used to stymie the movement, killing and injuring protestors. The active repression of organisers and protestors increased. This national repression culminated in the storming of Hama in early August 2011.

Hama's activists attempted to expel the security forces and liberate their city from the grips of the army. Debates regarding the feasibility of self-organisation following the expulsion of the state apparatus raged across the country until the activists decided they were capable of it.

²⁰ Ali Farhan's testimony was obtained by Fadi Aldahok prior to this essay

²¹ Fadi Aldahok, Deir ez-Zor... City of Revolution on the Euphrates' Banks; Al-Mustaqbal. Ed: 4439. August, 25, 2012.

In response, activists began to set up checkpoints in various neighbourhoods to prevent regime forces from entering. It was at this point that weapons began to infiltrate the peaceful movement, according to activist Rami Abu Zine El Abdine. At first, they were primarily dealing with lighter arms, such as hunting rifles. Eventually, arms dealers began to slowly appear in the city.

The activists were able to gain control of various neighbourhoods in Deir ez-Zor, reinforcing them with barriers made of steel and rubble. They organised themselves into neighbourhood defence militias, in order to prevent security forces from entering the city. The city's atmosphere transformed into one of anticipation, but protests still emerged almost daily.²²

'Liberating' Deir ez-Zor did not take long, and soon after the citizens took control, the regime started plotting its return. The regime called back troops from Aleppo and Damascus to take back the city. They stormed the city with more than 250 military vehicles, including tanks, and heavy weaponry. They imposed a siege on the city to reinforce control by force.²³

Storming the City

Before Deir ez-Zor was besieged by the regime army, representatives of the popular movement entered in negotiations with representatives of the regime. According to al-Furati, the popular movement stipulated that they would remove the checkpoints in various neighbourhoods if the regime agreed to stop raiding the homes of activists and release all political prisoners and detainees.

As the representatives were in Damascus taking part of negotiations, the regime sent the military reinforcements to Deir ez-Zor. Dozens of families

²² Large protest in Deir ez-Zor on July 24 2011 <http://www.syrrevnews.com/archives/2934>

²³ NOW News: الدبابات السورية تقتحم دير الزور و"انشقاق كبير" في الجيش, August 7 2011

The end of July... Intense shelling and Many Victims

28/07/2011 The first attempt at storming the city

30/07/2011 Shelling on the city from the city's western front towards the neighborhood of al-Joureh, with the deaths of many



After the seige on al-Joureh, the security forces storm the following neighborhoods: al-Howiqeh, al-Qusoor, al-Muwathafeen, al-Jabileh and al-'Amal

ended up fleeing their homes to nearby cities, for fear of retaliatory massacres by the regime.

I. END OF JUNE AND HEAVY SHELLING

On July 8, 2011, the regime army and the intelligence forces began an extensive operation in the city and began storming various neighbourhoods that had been hotbeds of revolutionary activity, such as al-Joureh and others. They began to shell these neighbourhoods, resulting in the deaths of many civilians and dozens of wounded.

On July 30, according to Abu Zine El Abdine,²⁴ Assad's forces advanced on the western parts of the city and began shelling al-Joureh with heavy artillery and tanks. They targeted civilian homes and belongings, killing dozens of civilians. Clashes occurred between civilians who had armed themselves and the army, using whatever they had: hunting rifles, molotov cocktails, etc. The fighting reached Ghassan Aboud downtown.

The second day of heavy shelling on al-Joureh saw a large number of civilian casualties and more than 50 wounded.²⁵ Within three days, the young men had been pushed back from the neighbourhood and the army was able to break through. The army stayed in the neighbourhood for six days, arresting dozens of activists while civilians rushed to bury their dead in gardens and public parks, as they were denied the privilege of burying their loved ones in cemeteries. Houses were burned as punishment for the crimes supposedly committed by their occupants, property was looted, and

²⁴the Regime tanks in Deir ez-Zor July 31 2011 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gOGpawzRqA>

²⁵ Names of wounded and martyrs in Deir ez-Zor <http://soo.gd/YWBs>

dozens were killed before the neighbourhood was declared 'safe' and 'rid of terrorists' by the regime.²⁶

After regaining control of al-Joureh, the military forces headed towards the east, to stop the local militias that had sprouted up in various eastern neighbourhoods like al-Qusoor, al-Howiqeh, and al-Muwathafeen. The army imposed a full siege on these neighbourhoods and carried out the same actions they had in al-Joureh. Following mass arrests, the army imposed checkpoints and security barriers to all entrances in the revolutionary neighbourhoods. During this besiegement, Asad's forces bombed Othman Bin Affan Mosque's minaret and transformed the mosque into a military checkpoint.²⁷

II. OLD AIRPORT NEIGHBOURHOOD

It is not a coincidence that the first demonstrations of the city took place in Othman Bin Affan, centrally located in the Old Airport neighbourhood. Most of the other mosques in the city had taken a firm stance against the protestors and activists, and as previously mentioned, had physically stopped the protestors.

The Old Airport neighbourhood was an important one for the activists; its residents were sympathetic to the revolution according to al-Furati, and would often shelter the activists from the regime's forces. The neighbourhood gradually turned into an incubator for all their ideas and movements.

According to several testimonies from Deir ez-Zor, the residents of the neighbourhood all came from the outskirts of the city, resettling sometime in the 1980s. They were forced to forge new social networks and found each other.

²⁶ Regime shelling in Deir ez-Zor <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mrefa7vpiZs>

²⁷ Regime gunfire in Deir ez-Zor <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vxjJSpaYmvo>

Most of the residents of the neighbourhood were employed by the state bureaucracy or students at the local university. Most of the residents were highly educated, left-leaning intellectuals as well. As such, the neighbourhood was referred to as “Little Moscow.”

Their new social networks retained a tribal and rural identity, but were expanded to the neighbourhood. In March 2011, when the youth decided to rise up against the regime, the neighbourhood supported the wholeheartedly. This neighbourhood became not only an important staging ground for the peaceful movement but also became the enter of revolutionary armed struggle in the city.

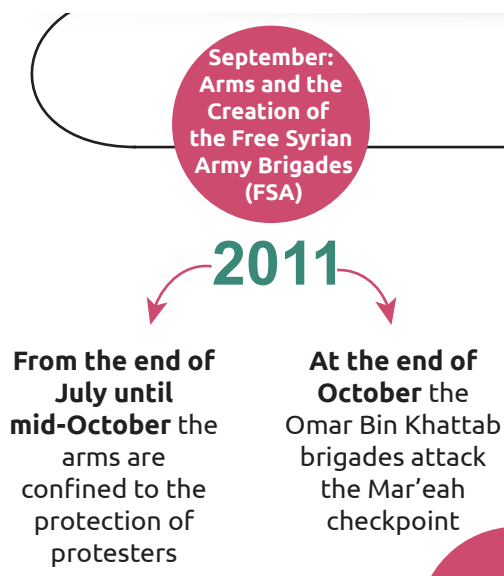
As a result, the regime’s forces attacked the neighbourhood on more than one occasion in order to put an end to the revolutionary activity. They launched a number of raids and arrested dozens of activists from the neighbourhood. They targeted this neighbourhood precisely for what it symbolised to the activists in Deir ez-Zor: the possibility for a peaceful path, supported by the population.

Chapter Two: Arms and the First Transformation

How did the peaceful uprising become an armed uprising? What factors led to people taking up arms? Who are the social groups that pushed for the arming of the revolution? What were the consequences?

September of Arms and the Free Syrian Army

Arms began to infiltrate the uprising in July 2011. Where previously they had not been carried, one would see masked youths at the periphery of protests carrying light arms. According to Abu Zine El Abdine, these youths would not inform the other activists that they would be there. Over time, these youths became a part of the city’s landscape.



Between the end of July and August, and until mid-October 2011, the armed presence was minimal. Those carrying arms at protests did so under the pretext of protecting them and would infrequently clash with regime forces, in a style akin to gang wars. Based on eyewitness testimony, the first firefight that took place between what would later be called the “Free Syrian Army” and the regime forces took place in October 2011, when rebels stormed a regime checkpoint.

According to Yaser Allawi, an activist from Deir ez-Zor’s Al-Muhasen²⁸ ²⁹, at the end of October 2011 a group was formed that referred to themselves as the Haj Mahmoud Muhasen group, which would later turn into Omar Bin

²⁸ Interview. January 2016.

²⁹ Al-Muhasen is located in the eastern part of the province of Deir ez-Zor along the Euphrates. It is characterised by its highly educated population.

Khattab battalion³⁰. This group carried out the first operation against the regime checkpoint in Al-Mar'eyeh, between Al-Muhasen and Deir ez-Zor next to the Al-Mar'eyeh school, close to the Deir ez-Zor military airport.

This checkpoint was notorious for harassing the inhabitants of the region; they even frequently arrested schoolchildren, demanding their identification papers and information.

One day, Allawi said, a regime officer, specifically a lieutenant, stopped a car full of teachers. He confiscated the mobile phone and personal purse of a teacher and inspected her belongings. This angered the rest of the teachers, who began to insult and yell at the forces at the checkpoint, resulting in minor clashes.

The Foundations of the Armed Opposition

25/11/2011

The FSA launches successive guerilla operations

They divide themselves into smaller groups in order to launch attacks against regime forces

These operations continue until March 2012

This news spread amongst the residents of the city, who saw the infraction against the teacher as an infraction against them. After this, a group of young men, specifically that of Omar Bin Khattab, decided to storm the checkpoint

and arrest the lieutenant in charge as a message to the other checkpoints and forces in the city who were harassing people in the city.

A group of nine young men from al-Muhasen planned this operation and one October day, carrying automatic rifles, approached the checkpoint and began shooting at the soldiers. The regime soldiers fled from their positions, and the young men took over the checkpoint, confiscating their weapons and equipment.

³⁰Omar Bin Khattab's Facebook page: <http://soo.gd/YtF2>

Their success served as inspiration for other groups. Smaller groups joined together and started planning military operations against other regime sites, which marked the formation of the first Free Syrian Army battalions in the city. Following the formation of Omar Bin Khattab battalion, Othman Bin Affan battalion were formed and in 2012, the Mohamad battalion were formed.

The Start of the Free Syrian Army

The first Free Syrian Army (FSA) groups to form in Deir ez-Zor were young men from the general public as well as defectors from the regime's army. Most came from the rural parts of the province, near Al-Muhasen, Al-Mar'eiye, Al-Saheel, and others.

Some of the members of these groups owned their own weapons and conducted their own exercises in the countryside, away from the city. Unanimously, the groups were in agreement about the need to keep their weapons and presence away from the public in Deir ez-Zor city in order to protect the people from reprisals from the regime.

In late 2011, in light of the developments in the countryside of Deir ez-Zor, the regime forces stormed the most important revolutionary outposts in Al-Muhasen, where most of the Omar Bin Khattab brigade members, including their leader, were from.³¹

The regime sent dozens of armoured vehicles, including BMPs and tanks accompanied by hundreds of infantry all who stormed Al-Muhasen from multiple directions. The fighters in the area tried to stave off the attack. However, due to the lack of weapons, they were forced to retreat and go into hiding from the regime's forces.

According to Yaser Allawi, Al-Muhasen was also subject to heavy shelling by the army. The army managed to raid the town, combing through each house, arresting activists en masse. The army repeated this in every nearby

³¹ Video of regime shelling of Al-Juzri village, December 25, 2011 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hbefPnDXVdo>

rural town and village, from Al-Quriyah and Al-Saheel.³² This only motivated the armed groups to retaliate against the regime.

On November 25, 2011, different groups of the Free Syrian Army managed to approach the Ghassan Aboud roundabout. The groups had become more dynamic and organised, and thus began the start of more operations against Asad's forces. The Free Syrian Army used guerrilla warfare tactics, whereby they divided themselves into smaller groups. They used their knowledge of the streets and their cities to attack regime forces and capture the ones that fled. This created a nightmare for Asad's forces.

The FSA used guerrilla warfare until March 2012. In the daytime, the fighters would act as normal civilians and pursue their daily business. Once the sun would set, they would launch attacks against the regime. On March 18, 2012 fierce battle gave way to dozens of victims in what would come to be known as the battle of Rusafa.

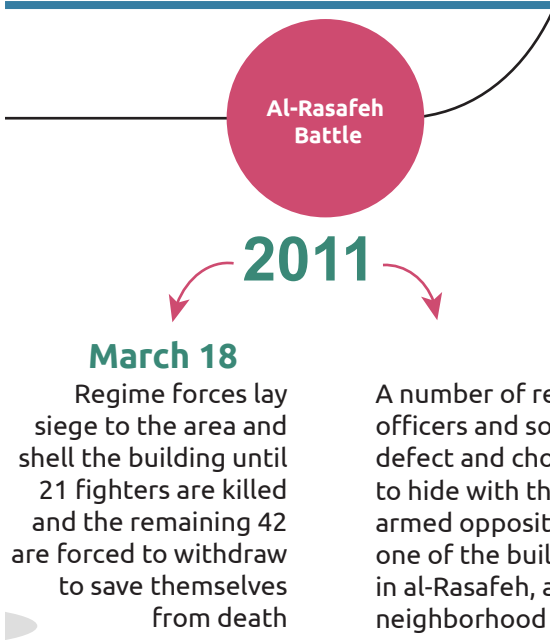
Battle of Rusafa, March 18, 2012

Leading up to this battle, the number of defections from the regime grew and those who defected oftentimes chose to join the FSA, including Abdulmu'ti Mohamad Hasan who was later killed on April 7, 2012, and Lieutenant Humam Ramadan. Upon defection, they chose to hide out in the Rusafa neighbourhood.

According to Yaser Allawi, who was traveling with the brigade as a journalist at the time, the young fighters chose Rusafa due its distant location from the city, making it easier for the fighters to escape to and from the neighbourhood in case of emergency.

Early morning March 18, 2012, the regime's forces spread heavily around the region, according to Allawi. The streets surrounding and leading to Rusafa were filled with BMPs and other armoured vehicles, with hundreds

³² Video showing the arrest campaign carried out by regime forces in Al-Quriyah, December 25 2011 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ytusi5M-lms>



of soldiers in the streets. Within a few hours, the regime moved closer to the building where the young men were hiding out.

At 9 o'clock in the morning, the regime's forces began shelling the building with tanks and heavy artillery. The FSA responded by firing their heavy weapons that they had on hand.

Meanwhile, Yaser Allawi was told by those trapped in the building that they had no hope to escape alive; the regime forces had tightened their grip on the area leaving no opportunity for them to withdraw and flee. Allawi told the fighters that they had two options: either surrender or fight until the death.

The young men chose to fight until death. One of the fighters told Allawi, "Don't forget that we tried our best... God knows we tried our best. Tell our children that we did not give up and that we fought with honour until our last breath."

Holed up between two apartments were 42 fighters,³³ with nothing but kalashnikovs, hand grenades, and assault rifles. The battle lasted four hours and 21 young fighters were killed and the rest were able to withdraw and flee. According to Allawi, the men split themselves into two groups, one that would pull out with the other covering the retreat. The group was able to escape, leaving behind the bodies of their comrades.

The battle lasted until midday. The shooting stopped completely and the regime forces withdrew abruptly, taking with them the dead and wounded who were killed amongst their ranks including intelligence officer Major Ayham Hamad from Tartous on the Syrian coast. The withdrawal of Asad's

³³ For more details about the Battle of Rusafa, see the report: معركة الرصافة ومقتل ابن أخت أصف شوكت, published by Mustaqbal on January 13, 2013 <http://www.almustaqbal.com/v4/Article.aspx?Type=np&Articleid=554633>

forces enabled the rest of the FSA fighters to withdraw from the area completely.

Several hours later, the regime army returned to the area to claim the bodies of the deceased FSA soldiers. They threw the bodies of the FSA soldiers off the buildings onto the street in front of the entire neighbourhood. They then stacked the bodies inside a truck on top of each other and filmed these bodies as those of “terrorists”. The Syrian Arab Army had transformed into Asad’s army. The Battle of Rusafa ended but the war for Deir ez-Zor had just begun.

The Subsistence of the Free Syrian Army

Between the second half of 2011 and the end of 2012, many different groups and battalions were formed. All fell under the general umbrella of the “Free Syrian Army.” Their goals were not exactly clear and they had no regulatory body. They only fought the Asad regime and sought to protect citizens, according to the majority of statements made by these groups over time.

In the city of Deir ez-Zor, the warfare took on a guerrilla nature, which was aimed more at harming the military forces rather than controlling the city. In the countryside, they expelled Asad’s forces from the areas in order to gain control of the various towns and villages, as Abu Kamal and Mayadeen for example which expelled Asad rule in early 2012.

I. SOCIOECONOMIC ORIGINS AND COMPOSITION OF THE FREE SYRIAN ARMY

The transition from peaceful movement to what is referred to as ‘armed struggle’ was composed of groups made of young men belonging to different socioeconomic groups in the city. At the leadership level, it is obvious that some did not have any military experience whatsoever. For example, a battalion commander within Omar Bin Khattab brigade was a former teacher of drawing. The commander of the Mohamad battalion was studying English language at a university in the city. Others still within the FSA



The Socioeconomic Composition of the Armed Opposition

- The majority of the groups are composed of youth belonging to different segments of the local population
- By the end of 2012, structural changes begin to occur in the composition of the armed opposition
- By the end of 2013, Jabhat al-Nusra is in control

were officers within the Syrian Arab Army and defected following the start of the revolution. The majority of the defectors were lieutenants, which indicates that they were at the start of their

professional military careers, ranging from 25 - 35 years of age.

Other members of the FSA still were mechanics, construction workers, and businessmen. Most of them, according to testimony, were leading fairly stable lives: they were married, or engaged, had a household and family to support, et cetera. Most of these young men were the first activists within the revolution. They picked up arms due to the severity of the repression by intelligence services and the army’s security forces. They firmly believed in the right to selfdefense.

From the second half of 2011 until the end of 2012, the leaders and activists were being targeted by Assad’s forces. According to the documented list of martyrs and missing persons, it is clear that many of these first defenders had been killed during fighting or suffered from debilitating injury, or had been detained by the intelligence forces.

From this, one can gather that at the end of 2012, structural changes occurred within the armed opposition, with the first iteration of the “Free Syrian Army” disappearing and a second generation appearing. This second generation featured new leaders, new fighters and new military formations. This stage is the most prominent, lasting from the end of 2012 until the end of 2013. After this, Jabhat al-Nusra took control of Deir ez-Zor’s political sphere. This next stage is explored in the following sections.

II. THE VIRUS OF FUNDING AND THE INFILTRATION OF POLITICAL MONEY

▼ **The Virus of Funding and the Infiltration of Political Money**

- At first, the groups are self-funded
- Then, the Revolutionary Council of Deir Ezzor finds a source for funding
- In the second-half of 2012, military groups started emerging with unknown funders



As with the revolutionary movements in the rest of the country, Deir ez-Zor underwent various different stages and changes. The changes were dependent on a complex set of factors, including the deaths of many revolutionary leaders, intensified violence,

and the various ideologies held by the fighters. The most important changing factor, however, was the infiltration of political money within the armed opposition. Attaining permanent funding and financial sources was necessary due to the high costs of armed activity.

The first operations of the FSA were funded through social networks, relying heavily on donations, for example, or the use of savings. Many weapons and ammunition were taken from Assad’s army. Considering the length of the war, these financial sources were unsustainable. The rebels had to search for more effective and sustainable sources of funding.

The Revolutionary Council of Deir ez-Zor began looking for funding outside of Syria, starting with Tayseer ‘Alouni who had ties to Qatar and Al-Qaeda. ‘Alouni was from Deir ez-Zor, and had left many years ago. He secured funding for various military battalions that then flocked to his command. Shortly after, conflict crept into his ranks and he was accused of corruption and embezzlement.

In the absence of documents and testimonies that could shed light on the funding mechanisms and their role in transforming the military scene in the Syrian uprising within the city of Deir ez-Zor, it is important to rely on observation and analysis of context in order to understand the dynamics that contributed to the shifts in the revolutionary movements.

At the start, as was pointed out, most battalions were self-funded. When the number of fighters increased alongside the intensity of the fighting, external funding was necessary to sustain the battalions. The Revolutionary

Council of Deir ez-Zor began searching for funding then. It was not until mid-2012 that one was able to see the impact of funding on the speech and actions of these battalions, which became increasingly at odds with the principles of dignity and freedom of the uprising. At this stage, an Islamist ideology characterised the nature of many battalions.

The Free Syrian Army and the Revolutionary Council of Deir ez-Zor fell out and the FSA withdrew most of its groups from the Revolutionary Council. This marked an important milestone in the transformation of the armed opposition. The brigades transformed to 'battalions' such as Al-Qa'qa' Battalion and the Ahwaz Battalion and the original front, which included many of the battalions and smaller groups within their ranks. These large groups had difficulty finding funding sources, but it is clear in hindsight where they eventually got their funding from due to their discourse.

It is within this stage, in the second half of 2012, that Islamist speech began to emerge from the ranks of the armed groups. These groups used Islamist ideology to structure their identity and they slowly pushed the FSA out of existence, which was still backed by broad categories of the uprising's society. The stated goals of the FSA were also replaced with talk of an Islamic caliphate, sectarianism, and the rule of Islamic law.

The public discourse of these groups also changed: rather than using terms like Asad's forces, they began to use pejorative sectarian descriptors like Nusayris, in reference to Asad's religious sect. The flags raised by these groups, oft-times replacing the Independence Flag, were also reference Islamic beliefs. The new armed groups made no secret their Islamist affiliation.

These changes allowed for infiltration by more radical groups, groups that are difficult to expel.

Chapter Three: Extremism and Political Islam

Islamist Battalions pave the way for more extremism

According to various eyewitness testimony and notes made available to the researchers, the armed groups underwent a number of different ‘arming’ stages, which lasted from July-August 2011 until the occupation of ISIL in Deir ez-Zor.

The stages following the dissolution of the FSA are split into three: the Islamist battalions, the takeover by Jabhat al-Nusra and the last stage of ISIL’s occupation.

I. ISLAMIST MILITARY FORMATIONS

The Islamist brigades rose to power following the decline of the FSA. They did not arrive out of nowhere, but had been in the countryside acting as ‘ sleeper cells ’ prior to the decline of the FSA, according to the testimonies of various activists. These brigades rose to power when the FSA lacked funding due to their ties with individuals like Tayseer ‘Alouni. These groups

had a variety of ideologies, ranging from moderate to more extreme, like Ahrar al-Sham and Ahfad al-Rasool.

In June 2012, the city of Deir ez-Zor began to see military actions resembling those in Homs. As a result, Deir ez-Zor also suffered from the harshness of the Assad regime’s retaliation as had other cities in Syria. The regime was quick to blockade the city from other parts of the province and began shelling the neighbourhoods with heavy weaponry.

Many different armed groups fought against Assad’s forces, and the regime attacked civilian neighbourhoods which led to the death of many

**The Stage of
Extremist
Islamic
Brigades**



June 2012

- The city becomes a target for various opposition military groups
- The regime quickly withdraws a number of the checkpoints from villages near the city’s neighborhoods
- Heavy shelling begins

civilians as well as the loss of property and the mass displacement of thousands.

Many witnesses place the blame on these new armed groups who often-times acted this way to please their financiers; many hold that these groups ought to be tried for 'treason' due to the damage that they caused by entering the city of Deir ez-Zor. Up to the point of their entrance, the non-violent protests had reached a peak, with thousands of people going out and protesting against Asad's rule.

Up until then, the city was home to many displaced, such as those escaping from Homs and other struck cities. In Deir ez-Zor, they had found shelter and had been welcomed with open arms by the city's families. In June 2012, the city transformed into a battlefield and thus the hosts to the displaced were also forced to wander the streets.

II. JABHAT AL-NUSRA

According to al-Furati, Jabhat al-Nusra appeared in Al-Shaheel, a town in eastern Deir ez-Zor, starting in mid-2012. The group was not a small isolated group, as the other Islamist groups, but a more established group with ties to Al-Qaeda in Iraq.

Al-Nusra was composed mostly of fighters from the area, and this could be a potential explanation for why they were tolerated by the various armed groups. Al-Nusra justified their presence in Syria by citing their 'support for the people of Syria' and would launch attacks against the Asad regime. However, they should have been treated warily by the groups due to their ties to the international Al-Qaeda project. However, it was due to the rhetoric employed by Al-Nusra that let other groups overlook their danger, which provided them the perfect opportunity to strengthen their ranks and embed their presence, creating the right circumstances for the next phase: their rise to power.

THE EXPANSION OF JABHAT AL-NUSRA

The Stage of Jabhat al-Nusra's Control



On July 25, 2012
Abu Mohamad Al-Jolani announces the formation of Jabhat al-Nusra

- **Early 2013**
Jabhat al-Nusra starts its operations against the Assad regime in the Deir Ezzor countryside
- **Late 2013**
Large swathes of land and villages in Deir Ezzor fall to the control of Jabhat al-Nusra
- **In 2013**
Al-Jolani announces his servitude to Zawahiri and Jabhat al-Nusra's allegiance to Al-Qaeda in Syria
- **May 2014**
The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh) is expelled from Jabhat al-Nusra and its control

At the start of 2013, Jabhat al-Nusra began to target the Assad regime via a number of operations in the countryside of Deir ez-Zor, according to al-Furati. These military operations marked a turning point in the city and the countryside, as they put extreme pressure on Assad's forces. Jabhat al-Nusra implemented suicide attacks and car bombs to target the regime, resulting in the deaths of many regime fighters. In practice, Jabhat al-Nusra did not implement combat operations and did not implement bombings within the city until the end of the first half of 2013. It was then that Jabhat al-Nusra emerged as the strongest group on the ground, and aimed to gain control of the city.

Until then, Jabhat al-Nusra had worked with the other armed groups in the region, including some of the remaining FSA groups. However, al-Nusra began imposing their own set of laws on areas under their control in the countryside, giving way to Islamic courts and committees to control the local community.

At the end of 2013, Jabhat al-Nusra gained control of large swathes of land in Deir ez-Zor, specifically where the oil and gas wells are located.

The groups that would work with al-Nusra continued to multiply. The new groups all had an Islamist flavour to them and were part of the Syrian jihadist current, like the Islamic Front, Sons of Islam Movement, and Tawheed Army and Al-Ansar brigades and Al-Sa'aqeh Brigades.

JABHAT AL-NUSRA AND ISIL BATTLE OVER OIL

Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIL did not begin by battling each other; rather, it was assumed that Al-Nusra was an extension of ISIL, with Abu Mohamad al-Jolani merely a 'commander' of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. In April 2013, al-Baghdadi read a statement that called al-Nusra and ISIL a single entity. Al-Jolani responded with a counter-statement, denying all ties with ISIL and instead pledging allegiance to Ayman al-Zawahiri, the Al-Qaeda leader, thus establishing al-Nusra as Al-Qaeda in Syria.³⁴

Since then, the battle between ISIL and al-Nusra has raged on. The battle has been for legitimacy and recognition and expanded to be a struggle for power and control of gas and oil. In 2013, al-Nusra had rapprochement with many groups in order to confront ISIL. However, ISIL managed to impose their rule on the region, forcing most of the groups to pledge allegiance to them.

In the meantime, the Asad regime was still imposing its control on Deir ez-Zor city. Though there had been operations launched against the regime forces, the regime was able to maintain its control over the region without being threatened by the various armed groups.

III. THE ISLAMIC STATE OF IRAQ AND THE LEVANT (ISIL)

Al-Shaheel was Jabhat al-Nusra's headquarters in eastern Syria. Al-Nusra launched military campaigns and operations from there and most of the fighters that initially joined were from the town. In July 2014, ISIL expelled al-Nusra from the town thus uprooting al-Nusra from the eastern region of Syria, from Deir ez-Zor to Raqqa. All areas that had been under Al-Nusra rule fell to ISIL.³⁵

Once ISIL had established control over the countryside, they turned their eyes towards Deir ez-Zor city. They managed to enter the city through the Siyasi crossing, and according to eyewitness testimony, the group gained control over most of the city's neighbourhoods, such as Sheikh Yassin,

³⁴ "Profiling Jabhat al-Nusra" William McCants and Charles Lister, Brookings Institute. 2016.

³⁵ For more details, please see the report aired on Al Arabiya: <http://soo.gd/s0Lp>

The Stage of The Islamic State (Da'esh)



Mid 2014

- At the time of writing, Da'esh has the citizens of Deir Ezzor by their necks
- Da'esh carries out a number of massacres: September 2014 More than 700 are killed, mostly by slaughter

Al-'Ardi, eastern Al-Huqiyah, Al-Hamidiyeh, parts of western Al-Huqiyeh, Al-Rashideh, Muwathafeen, Al-Jabileh, Al-Sana'ah, the Old Airport, Rusafa, and Al-'Amel.

Over time, the armed groups in Deir ez-Zor vanished with the remaining ones pledging allegiance to ISIL.

From mid-2014 until the time of publication, ISIL has become a living nightmare for the people of Deir ez-Zor. Where the Asad regime failed to break the resolve and spirits of the people, ISIL has succeeded. ISIL has

carried out massacres against the civilian population, who have been accused of apostasy and infidelity. In September 2014, ISIL massacred over 700 people, all boys and men above the age of 14, from the Al-Sheitat tribe. All 700 had their throats slit.³⁶

³⁶ For more details, see the following: "ناجون يروون للمرة الأولى وقائع قتل 800 في مجزرة عشيرة الشعيطات" by Omar Kayed. Al-Hayat. October 3, 2014.

Conclusion

Deir ez-Zor has suffered insurmountable loss. First, at the hands of the Asad regime then at the hands of ISIL and other oppressive organisations. Large parts of the city have been destroyed by the regime forces. When the regime was unable to subdue the city's revolutionary fervour, siege and starvation tactics were adopted.

Despite all attempts to intimidate, and despite being stuck between two terrors in Syria, the province has remained brave and steadfast to the revolution and its goals to build a Syria for all Syrians, refusing dictatorship and tyranny.

Deir ez-Zor underwent many transformations in the past five years. Though the city was one of the first cities to revolt, it did not receive its fair share of media coverage or research and attention. In this paper, we have attempted to shed light on the events that took place in the city and the changes that occurred since 2011. However, we recognise that the work lacks true familiarity and understanding of the details of the city. We hope that this paper brings attention to the city and its plight, to inspire researchers and others to continue to reveal details about Deir ez-Zor within the Syrian uprising.

Methodology

Since mid-March 2011, Syrian cities -- their social formations and geography -- have been in flux. Though the revolutionary processes have resembled one another and intersected at many points, each city contains its own idiosyncrasies and distinctions. Thus, a macroscopic study of each city is needed to tell the story of what unfolded in each city.

The beginning of the revolutionary movement in Syria is characterised by the suppression of free speech and independent media by the Asad regime. Media teams and researchers are banned from entry and work in Syria, and thus it is a new independent media that sought to document and broadcast daily events.

For decades, Syria was a 'kingdom of silence' and Asad, both father and son' succeeded in maintaining it as such despite various activities in the country. After the start of the Syrian uprising in 2011, the regime failed to contain the story and civilians took on the task of producing knowledge about what was happening in the city.

This project, "Cities in Revolution", was born in this context. At first, different cities were selected for targeted research and later, each city had independent teams conduct fieldwork in order to gather information, verify information, and obtain photographs and video footage.

The primary source of information is eyewitness testimony, which was obtained and recorded by activists involved in the city's transformations. These testimonies were verified and thus became valid to use in research. The secondary source of information was electronic references, that is: videos and written testimonies. After information was gathered about each city, there were comparisons made across the different events and the events that were corroborated by a number of different sources and had consensus amongst eyewitnesses were ultimately used. Any gaps were

filled in by the research team, who relied on exclusive sources and electronic sources.

In any case, it must be noted that we are unable to claim neutrality and absolute objectivity in the production of this project: the team doing this work is biased to the revolution of the Syrian people. Those whose testimonies are present in the work are opposed to the Asad regime. That said, as much research and measures as possible were put in place to remain as true as possible to ethics of objectivity, hence this disclosure.

“Cities in Revolution” does not claim to portray the complete objective truth. And we hope that our efforts will be used by Syrian activists and movements as a means to fill at least some gaps in knowledge.

We would like to extend our gratitude to the eyewitnesses, who donated precious time and effort to relay their stories to us. We would like to also extend gratitude to the different downs who rose against tyranny and to all who contributed to the success of this project.

Team

SABR DARWISH

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MOHAMMAD DIBO

Current editor-in-chief of SyriaUntold (Arabic), and an editor at al-Arabi al-Jadid. Dibo is a Syrian poet, writer and researcher interested in Syrian culture and economy. Dibo's latest work is an autobiographical book, "Like He Who Witnesses His Own Death", about his experience in prison during the early days of the Syrian uprising. He is a regular contributor in many Arab and international newspapers.

Cities in Revolution

The complexity of the situation in Syria, the regime's efforts in dividing the opposition as well as the growing militarisation of the conflict has led to very various forms of revolutions depending on the geographical areas or cities where the uprising took place. In this multifaceted context, the narrative on the Syrian events often tends to simplify what actually is a complex and varied reality on the ground. Moreover, the overabundance of information on Syria and the fast pace of news production make it difficult to ensure the validity of facts and figures and to establish a chronological, as objective as possible account of the events since March 2011.

Through the use of innovative forms of storytelling mixing research-based written content, infographics and documentary videos, the *Cities in Revolution* project's objective is to fill this gap by documenting a comprehensive, chronological account of the events as they happened in six different cities, in all their complexity and diversity, with a focus on civil movements and creative disobedience. Each multimedia documentary file will rely on content already available, but also on research and information collected by activists on the ground for this specific purpose.

Cities in Revolution is funded through the Ebticar grant from Canal France International (CFI) and the European Union.

SyriaUntold

SyriaUntold is an independent digital media project exploring the storytelling of the Syrian struggle and the diverse forms of resistance. We are a team of Syrian writers, journalists, programmers and designers living in the country and abroad trying to highlight the narrative of the Syrian revolution, which Syrian men and women are writing day by day. Through grassroots campaigns, emerging forms of self-management and self-government and endless manifestations of citizen creativity, a new outspoken Syria has emerged, after decades of repression and paralysis. With mainstream media focusing increasingly on geostrategic and military aspects and less on internal dynamics developing on the ground, we believe there are many aspects of the Syrian struggle that remain uncovered, many stories that we would not like to see forgotten.