

Anti-ISIS Coalition Begins Losing Tribal Support in Syria

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Key Takeaway:

Major tribal leaders in eastern Syria may break away from the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which would severely jeopardize the anti-ISIS mission by fracturing the US partner force in Syria. Leaders of the largest Arab tribal confederation in eastern Syria's Deir ez-Zour Province have demanded that the SDF yield administrative control of that province to local tribal leadership before September 11, 2020. Tribal animosity toward the SDF has been building since mid-2019 due to the combined pressures of overlapping ISIS and pro-regime insurgencies as well as the SDF's weak and under-resourced governance. The continued presence of SDF and coalition forces in Deir ez-Zour could become untenable if the SDF fails to find a compromise with increasingly fractured tribal elements.

Tripwire:

A major tribal powerbroker in eastern Syria's Deir ez-Zour Province issued the United States a 30-day ultimatum demanding the transfer of administrative control in SDF-held areas in Deir ez-Zour to "the region's tribes" by September 11. An unidentified sheikh from the Aqidat tribal confederation delivered the ultimatum in the name of the tribe's leader, Sheikh Ibrahim al Hifl, at the conclusion of a conference of thousands of Aqidat tribal members in the village of Dhiban, southeast of al Busayrah, on August 11.¹ The statement does not demand a transfer of military control to the tribes, indicating the new tribal governing entity demanded by the tribes would continue to accept the presence of SDF military forces in the province. The ultimatum implies but does not specify that the Aqidat tribesmen present at the conference will reject the SDF entirely and declare independence if the demand is not met. The ultimatum is the harshest rebuke of the SDF to date and represents a breaking point in its relationship with the Aqidat, the largest Arab tribal confederation in Deir ez-Zour.

Pattern:

Tensions between tribal leaders and the SDF have been rising in Deir ez-Zour since the final liberation of the province from ISIS in March 2019 due to the combined pressures of an ISIS resurgence, a similar but lower level campaign of guerilla attacks by pro-regime actors, and the SDF's limited capacity to meet the substantial administrative and security requirements to rehabilitate and govern liberated communities.² The SDF has attempted to grant concessions but has been consistently unable to prevent further deterioration in the security situation and has remained unwilling to transfer administrative authority to tribal leadership. The SDF administers the province through the Deir ez-Zour Civil Council. The council is chaired by two local Arab leaders who have limited decision-making authority and rely on the SDF and the Autonomous Administration of North East Syria (AANES), the SDF-supported Kurdish-led government, for security assistance and funding.³ The SDF organizes local security through the Deir ez-Zour Military Council, which is subordinate to the SDF and led by Ahmad Abu Khawla of the Aqidat tribe's Bakir clan.⁴ The Deir ez-Zour Military Council has participated in counter-ISIS operations in the province alongside Arab, Kurdish, and other minority SDF units from other provinces since 2016.⁵ In 2020, the SDF's mainly-Kurdish anti-terror forces, which depend on the support of local tribal partners, participated in joint counter-ISIS operations with US forces.⁶ The SDF-led, -armed, and -funded Provincial Security Forces and Internal Security Forces that recruit from the local Arab population also police Deir ez-Zour.⁷

ISIS and pro-regime actors are waging separate but overlapping insurgent campaigns to drive tribal resentment toward the SDF in order to exploit the resulting vacuum. ISIS has conducted a low-scale insurgency across Deir ez-

Zour Province since mid-2017. ISIS has carried out a campaign of executions and kidnappings targeting local tribal elders and pro-SDF officials intended to exploit and widen the seam between the SDF and the liberated population.⁸ ISIS ramped up this campaign after it lost its last physical zone of control in Baghuz near the Iraqi border in March 2019 and shifted its focus to the Euphrates River Valley, where the Aqidat tribe is now threatening to withdraw support from the SDF.⁹ Meanwhile, pro-regime forces have sought to accelerate and extend the impact of ISIS's campaign by conducting their own insurgent attacks, including assassinations since at least mid-2018.¹⁰ The regime does not take responsibility for pro-regime insurgent attacks, creating uncertainty regarding the scale of ISIS's own campaign.

The regime and its backers are actively recruiting tribal members to join their militias while soliciting defections from the SDF. Pro-regime forces have also recruited "scores" of the Baqara tribe in Deir ez-Zour and Aleppo to join the Iran-backed Liwa al Baqir militia in opposition to the SDF.¹¹ Liwa al Baqir declared jihad against US forces in Syria in April 2018.¹² The regime has had little success securing defections from the SDF despite Russian attempts to support this effort. Pro-regime forces met with representatives of the Jabbour tribe in Tell Brak, Hasakah, to organize a pro-regime "Syrian Tribal Mobilization" militia on October 26, 2019. The Aqidat and Baqara tribes of Deir ez-Zour refused this invitation, and the delegates in attendance did not ultimately establish a new tribal militia.¹³

Arab tribes began conducting mass protests against the SDF for its failure to govern liberated areas in May 2019. This resistance marked a significant deterioration in the relationship between these populations and the SDF and indicated at least partial success of efforts by ISIS and the regime to provoke such unrest. Peaceful protestors across Deir ez-Zour, Hasakah, and Raqqa provinces condemned high fuel prices and the SDF's failure to provide basic services. Rising security requirements due to ISIS and pro-regime attacks further limited the SDF's ability to address these basic governance issues. Increasingly sweeping joint raids by US forces and the SDF against ISIS became another source of tribal resentment, accelerating the deterioration of SDF-tribal relations in Deir ez-Zour even as they disrupted some ISIS operations. Tribal leaders began to claim that the SDF's Kurdish leadership was unfairly targeting Arab communities as retribution against ISIS.¹⁴ Other complaints included accusing the SDF of torturing prisoners and forcibly conscripting children.¹⁵

This tension approached a breaking point in July 2020. As the ISIS and pro-regime attack campaigns continued to worsen security conditions and impose casualties on key tribes, tribal leaders broadened their demands to include improved security.¹⁶ However, the ensuing SDF counterinsurgent operation aimed at fulfilling this demand triggered further accusations of SDF overreach and did not significantly improve security.¹⁷ The SDF remained unable to provide the tribes with the level of security they demanded without conducting the kinds of raids the tribes oppose. Various tribal elements have responded differently to this fundamental challenge, in some cases demanding autonomy from the SDF to secure their areas with direct coalition support and contemplating new arrangements with the regime in others.

Timing:

The assassination of a senior sheikh of the Aqidat tribal confederation's leading al Hifl clan sparked the clan's escalation to an ultimatum in early August. Unknown gunmen assassinated sheikh Mutashar al Hifl by opening fire on his car near the clan's power center in Dhiban, southeast of Mayadin, on August 2, 2020.¹⁸ Another clan leader, Sheikh Ibrahim al Hifl, was wounded. The attack was the highest profile assassination in the province to date. Tribal leaders variously blamed Mutashar Al Hifl's killing on the SDF, the regime, Turkey, and ISIS.¹⁹ The pattern of attacks across Deir ez-Zour in 2020 indicates ISIS likely conducted the attack. Pro-ISIS Telegram channels lauded the assassination immediately after it occurred, accusing Mutashar and Ibrahim al Hifl of being Alawite stooges for the regime. The regime or another covert actor such as Russia or Turkey could also be responsible for the assassination. The SDF arrested a member of a regime-backed militia on July 29 and reported that he confessed on August 7 that his Deir ez-Zour assassination cell had recently attacked two sheikhs as part of the "Armed Arab Resistance," implicating them in the death of Mutashar al Hifl.²⁰

Three general branches of the Aqidat tribal confederation with competing demands have emerged after the assassination, each of which began to sideline the SDF's leadership and negotiate only with the US.

1. Sheikh Ibrahim al Hifl, who survived the August 2 assassination attempt, was the driving force behind the conference that produced the ultimatum on August 11. Ibrahim al Hifl has thrice refused to negotiate with the SDF since his survival of the assassination attempt and is gaining support among his fellow tribesmen.²¹ Leading sheikhs from several other Aqidat clans called on their members to defect from the SDF in solidarity with al Hifl's movement both before and after the conference.²²
2. A faction of the Hifl clan is orienting toward the Syrian regime. This faction, led by Asad Saoud al Hifl, announced the formation of an "Aqidat Army" in regime-held Deir ez-Zour City on August 9 and declared support for a regime return to eastern Deir ez-Zour.²³ A few other factions have begun to openly endorse a return of regime governance as an alternative to the SDF and may join this "Aqidat Army."²⁴ None of the tribesmen who have pledged support for this army are confirmed to live on the east bank of the Euphrates, but they may be able to influence or recruit members of their clan on the east bank to endorse armed anti-SDF rebellion.
3. The Aqidat's Bakir clan announced continued support for the SDF-backed Deir ez-Zour Military Council in al Suwar on August 13 in order to distance themselves from Ibrahim al Hifl's defection initiative and to reinforce their clan's role in the SDF.²⁵ However, the clan addressed its statement directly to the US and not the SDF, indicating that they continue to accept the SDF primarily because of its US support. Chairman of the Deir ez-Zour Military Council Ahmad Abu Khawla is a member of the Bakir clan and could gain more influence within the SDF as Aqidat members pull away. The Bakir clan leaders echoed Ibrahim Hifl's demands for a transparent investigation into the assassination of Mutashar al Hifl and added a new demand that the SDF reclaim several Arab villages north of Deir ez-Zour City that are controlled by pro-regime militias.

Further splintering is occurring and will likely continue despite Ibrahim al Hifl's attempt to marshal a coordinated response among at least the Aqidat. Tribes outside the Aqidat, including the region's second largest tribe, the Baqara, have also variously expressed support for each of the above three factions. Most dangerously, pro-regime Baqara sheikh Nawaf al Bashir renewed past calls for Arab tribes on both banks of the Euphrates to join a pro-regime tribal militia, which may coordinate with the "Aqidat Army," on August 10.²⁶ In many cases, tribal or even clan leaders are divided on whether to continue to accept the SDF. This fragmentation complicates the SDF's ability to appease a growing number of interlocutors.

Orientation	Leaders/Tribes Participating	Notable Meetings	Outcome
Pro-regime	Hifl Clan of Aqidat Tribe: Asad Sa'oud al Hifl, Abd al-Karim al-Hifl.	August 9, Deir ez-Zour City	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Creation of the Aqidat Army. 2. Full support of the Syrian regime and Syrian Arab Army
	Bu Arab Clan of Baqara Tribe: Nawaf al Bashir.		
	Other supporters: Muhammad al-Gharb al-Harisa, Suleiman al-Abyan and Obaid al-Fandi. Possibly supported by Sabkha tribe , Sharabiya tribe .		
Tribal Independence	Hifl Clan of Aqidat Tribe: Ibrahim al Hifl, Musa'ab al Hifl	August 11, Dhiban	<p>Listed 5 demands for the coalition, granting them one month to comply:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The formation of an independent committee to investigate the assassination of Sheikh Mutashar Al-Hafl 2. Transfer of the administration of Deir ez-Zour Province to Arab tribes 3. Release of innocent detainees 4. Removal of women and children from camps 5. For all active forces to advance the process of a political solution in Syria
	Hassoun Clan of Aqidat Tribe: Sheikh Nabil Al-Dandal		
	Other supporters: Muhammad Faris abd al Rahman (Bu Issa Clan, Tayy tribe), Khatib Elias al Mustafa (Albu Assi Tribe)		
Pro-SDF	Bakir Clan of Aqidat Tribe: Unidentified Sheikhs and unidentified members of Sheitat Clan, Mushahada Clan, Bu Hassan Clan, Qaraan Clans, all also of Aqidat Tribe	August 13, al Suwar	<p>Listed 6 demands for the coalition and declared support for the Deir ez-Zour military council and the SDF.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Investigation of the recent string of assassinations 2. Support, economic and moral, for the military council 3. Rejection and expulsion of the regime in our seven expelled villages 4. The international community assuming primary responsibility 5. Work to push for a political solution in Syria for a unified, free Syria 6. The Bakir tribe is fundamental partner that cannot be removed from the Aqidat tribal confederation. <i>[This "demand" likely demonstrates Aqidat tribe infighting in the lead up to the August 13 meeting.]</i>
	Other supporters: Muhammad Araf (Sharabeen Tribe), Hamid al Afadh (Anza Tribe), Manaf al Raja (Albu Amir Tribe); Unidentified members of Jabour Tribe, Qala'in Tribe		

Assessment:

The SDF, and the anti-ISIS coalition by extension, will lose control of Deir ez-Zour Province if it fails to secure continued support from the Aqidat tribal leadership or if the Aqidat splinters to a degree that precludes an enduring accommodation. While most of the tribes' public demands thus far focus on administrative control, they have begun to direct anger toward the SDF's predominantly Arab Deir ez-Zour military council. Early indicators point to a growing risk that some tribal leaders will expel SDF military forces from their area, which would put the situation on its most-dangerous trajectory. Local leaders expelled non-Baqara tribe SDF units conducting arrests from Jadid Baqara on August 16.²⁷ SDF Commander Mazloum al Abdi responded to the expulsion by meeting with Baqara

tribal leaders, who refused to return weapons they had seized from the SDF, on August 17.²⁸ The SDF will not be able to maintain security along key ground lines of communication between Deir ez-Zour and Hasakah provinces without the support of the local population, particularly if facing two separate revolts from the Akidat and Baqara tribes. If more SDF units are rejected by the communities they police, the security situation in remote areas of Deir ez-Zour will further deteriorate.

A coherent, independent tribal council is unlikely to emerge as a viable US partner in Deir ez-Zour. Ibrahim al Hifl will likely announce such a council after the September 11 deadline, but it is unclear how much support he will gain within and beyond the Aqidat. His support thus far indicates he could wrest administrative and security control over at least a portion of the Euphrates River Valley south of Mayadin but will likely face competition. That said, an independent tribal entity – or a constellation of them – will not have the capacity to respond to growing ISIS attacks. Arab SDF elements depend on the SDF's Kurdish and Kurdish-aligned leadership for financial support and supplies, which the tribes will not receive if they and their loosely affiliated forces leave the SDF. Pro-independence tribal leaders who have called for SDF defections have not demonstrated access to any arms or control over militias, moreover. Arab SDF members may desert with weapons they already possess or attempt to seize weapons from other SDF units integrated in their areas. Defectors, even in cases of mass defection, are unlikely to be centrally organized or have access to a consistent source of funding without coalition or regime support. The SDF would not be able to succeed in the counter-ISIS effort if major tribal factions defected; similarly, those tribal factions would not have the ability to take on ISIS if entirely self-organized.

The willingness of other tribal leaders to turn to pro-regime forces for support is a major inflection and could lead to new tribal competition. In a most dangerous course of action, Ibrahim al Hifl could turn to the regime to offset a possible loss of US support or to gain support from regime-leaning tribal elements. Most likely, a new power struggle will unfold across the province between the fractured tribal power centers and drive further fragmentation.

Implications:

The US is unprepared to meet this crisis. US forces on the ground do not have the capacity to resolve this crisis, which requires substantial diplomatic engagement. High-level US diplomatic engagement in Syria to date has prioritized bridging relationships between the largely Kurdish SDF leadership and Turkey rather than retaining and consolidating local Arab support for the SDF. Enduring perceptions of President Trump's desire to withdraw from Syria further weaken the credibility of local US interlocutors on the ground. Local attempts by coalition officials to broker mediation that includes the SDF since August 9 have thus far failed to even draw attendance from the leading Hifl clan.

Momentum is spreading to other provinces, meanwhile. Tribes in Raqqa and Hasakah have expressed solidarity with the Aqidat since the August 2 assassination and could begin making similar demands for independence.²⁹ The Baqara tribe in southern Hasakah, whom pro-regime forces have previously succeeded in recruiting, may also threaten SDF ground lines of control from Deir ez-Zour to Hasakah, challenging the SDF's ability to govern and secure the Middle Euphrates River Valley. The Baqara and Akeidat tribal revolts may have different aims, making it difficult for the SDF to broker a single deal.

Much is at stake for the anti-ISIS mission. The coalition presence at oil fields in Deir ez-Zour could become untenable. Coalition forces in Deir ez-Zour are currently spread thin, with small bases in major towns and near critical oil infrastructure. This force posture depends on the SDF's Deir ez-Zour Military Council to provide a minimum level of security. It will be very difficult for the coalition to replace this partner with a patchwork of tribal militias that are not unified under the SDF's command. Furthermore, the coalition depends on local contacts for intelligence on ISIS and at least minimum acceptance of counter-ISIS operations.

ISIS could experience a breakout success within the Middle Euphrates River Valley rivaled only by its freedom of movement in the barely populated, regime-occupied Central Syrian Desert. There, ISIS has conducted complex attacks on Syrian regime forces, including ambushes that have killed tens of pro-regime personnel.³⁰ ISIS could use its freedom of movement in this zone and across the Syrian-Iraqi border further east to mount a major campaign

in Deir ez-Zour from multiple directions. In a worst-case scenario, ISIS could even wrest territorial control from the SDF's remnants.

In the event of a significant tribal revolt, the regime may succeed at establishing a beachhead on the eastern bank of the Euphrates River that it could use to target the SDF's oil infrastructure. Control over oil fields is a key regime objective and, as such, has been the SDF's main leverage in past negotiations with the regime. Pro-regime forces would likely wait to evaluate whether the US will withdraw willingly but could decide to support attacks against coalition forces at these facilities to accelerate a US withdrawal. The pro-regime "Popular Uprising in the Eastern Areas" insurgent group fired rockets at a coalition base at the Conoco oil fields on August 18.³¹ An expansion of similar attacks would limit the effectiveness of units at these bases.

Indicators:

The SDF and coalition are actively working to negotiate with a wide range of tribal partners. An accommodation that averts the establishment of an independent tribal council remains possible but will remain under significant stress due to the continued deterioration of security conditions. Further tactical SDF concessions, such as the release of prisoners, are unlikely to fix the underlying problems in tribal-SDF relations. Terms that establish a permanent place for tribal leadership in the structure of SDF governance, including possible permanent seats on the Deir ez-Zour Civil and Military Councils or per-region elections, are more likely to stabilize the tribal-SDF relationship in the short term. No single agreement is likely to appease all the tribes. The Baqara tribe or rival Aqidat clans could reject a plan that grants the Hifl clan a leadership role, leading them to defect from a renegotiated governing or military council. Tribal units under the Military Council may collectively defect under pressure from specific tribe or clan leadership. The SDF and United States will continue to face a significant diplomatic requirement to prevent deterioration of the security situation.

High-level defections from the SDF or a move by the Deir ez-Zour Military Council to separate itself structurally from the SDF's chain of command would indicate negotiations are not on track to appease tribal demands. Caution is necessary, however. Pro-regime and pro-Turkish media are likely to continue prior efforts to spread disinformation regarding large-scale defections. Actual defections of tens or hundreds of Arab SDF soldiers would mark a red flag that the SDF is disintegrating. Additionally, tribal leaders announcing their independence from the SDF or ejecting the SDF from their villages in advance of the September 11 deadline would indicate that negotiations failed and that further deterioration is to follow.

¹ Deir ez-Zour 24 ["The conclusions of a meeting of the Aqidat tribe in rural eastern Deir ez-Zour"], *Youtube*, August 11, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ss7cyjiNeks>. ISW defines a tribal leader as one consistently referenced by clans within a tribe as the leading sheikh. Ibrahim and Musa'ab al Hifl have been repeatedly acknowledged by non-Hifl clans within the Aqidat as vocal leaders.

² Jennifer Cafarella with Brandon Wallace and Jason Zhou, "ISIS'S Second Comeback: Assessing the Next ISIS Insurgency," *Institute for the Study of War*, July 23rd, 2019. <http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/ISW%20Report%20-%20ISIS%27s%20Second%20Comeback%20-%20June%202019.pdf>.

³ ["The Founding of Deir ez-Zour's Civil Council,"] *Jorf News*, September 26, 2018, [https://jorfnews\(.\)com/?p=4086](https://jorfnews(.)com/?p=4086).

⁴ Barak Barfi, "Managing Washington's Flawed Partners in Eastern Syria," *The Washington Institute for Near East Peace*, October 17, 2017, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/managing-washingtons-flawed-partners-in-eastern-syria>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Stavros Atlamazoglu, "Turkey Attacks Compound of Elite US-led Kurdish Counterterrorism Unit," *SOFREP*, October 12th, 2019, <https://sofrep.com/news/turkey-attacks-compound-of-elite-us-led-kurdish-counterterrorism-unit/>.

⁷ "Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve I Quarterly Report to the United States Congress I July 1, 2019 - October 25, 2019," *Department of Defense Lead Inspector General Operation Inherent Resolve*, October 25, 2019, https://media.defense.gov/2019/Nov/21/2002214786/-1/-1/1/Q4FY2019_LEADIG_OIR_REPORT_PDF.

⁸ Jennifer Cafarella with Brandon Wallace and Jason Zhou, "ISIS'S Second Comeback: Assessing the Next ISIS Insurgency," *Institute for the Study of War*, July 23rd, 2019,

<http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/ISW%20Report%20-%20ISIS%27s%20Second%20Comeback%20-%20June%202019.pdf>

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Jennifer Cafarella and Matti Suomenaro with Catherine Harris, “Russia and Iran Prepare Offensive Targeting US and Partner Forces in Eastern Syria,” June 25, 2018, <http://www.iswresearch.org/2018/06/russia-and-iran-prepare-offensive.html>.

¹¹ Jennifer Cafarella and Matti Suomenaro with Catherine Harris, “Russia and Iran Prepare Offensive Targeting US and Partner Forces in Eastern Syria,” June 25, 2018, <http://www.iswresearch.org/2018/06/russia-and-iran-prepare-offensive.html>; Mohammad Hassan, “Arab Tribes in al-Hasakah and Deir ez-Zor Choose Their Allies,” *Chatham House*, January 2020 <https://syria.chathamhouse.org/research/arab-tribes-in-al-hasakah-and-deir-ez-zor-choose-their-allies>.

¹² “Amir Toumaj and Romany Shaker, “IRGC-controlled Syrian Militia Declares Jihad against US Forces in Syria,” *Long War Journal*, April 13, 2018, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2018/04/irgc-controlled-syrian-militia-declares-jihad-against-us-forces-in-syria.php>.

¹³ Mohammad Hassan, “Arab Tribes in al-Hasakah and Deir ez-Zor Choose Their Allies,” *Chatham House*, January 2020 <https://syria.chathamhouse.org/research/arab-tribes-in-al-hasakah-and-deir-ez-zor-choose-their-allies>.

¹⁴ [“A Scandal... a Fatal Mistake Embarrasses the SDF in an Operation against the Islamic State in Deir ez-Zour,”] *El Dorar*, July 19, 2020. [http://eldorar\(.\)com/node/153896](http://eldorar(.)com/node/153896).

¹⁵ [“Deir ez-Zour... the SDF returns a Martyr to his Family, Having Killed him by Torture,”] *Baladi News*, July 22, 2020, [https://www\(.\)baladi-news.com/ar/articles/63121/%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B2%D9%88%D8%B1...%22%D9%82%D8%B3%D8%AF%22-%D8%AA%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%85-%D8%B4%D9%87%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A7-%D9%84%D8%B0%D9%88%D9%8A%D9%87-%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%87-%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%B0%D9%8A%D8%A8](https://www(.)baladi-news.com/ar/articles/63121/%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B2%D9%88%D8%B1...%22%D9%82%D8%B3%D8%AF%22-%D8%AA%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%85-%D8%B4%D9%87%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A7-%D9%84%D8%B0%D9%88%D9%8A%D9%87-%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%87-%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%B0%D9%8A%D8%A8) ; [“Two Girls in One Week and the Opposition Accuses Itself of Kidnapping,”] *al Alam TV*, July 6, 2020,

[https://www.alalamtv\(.\)net/news/5032051/%D8%B7%D9%81%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AE%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A3%D8%B3%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%B9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AF-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B6%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%AA%D9%87%D9%85-%D9%86%D9%81%D8%B3%D9%87%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D8%B7%D9%81](https://www.alalamtv(.)net/news/5032051/%D8%B7%D9%81%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AE%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A3%D8%B3%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%B9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AF-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B6%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%AA%D9%87%D9%85-%D9%86%D9%81%D8%B3%D9%87%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D8%B7%D9%81); [“With the continuation of the security campaign in rural Deir ez-Zour... the SDF raids six river crossings and confiscates rafts for smuggling into Syrian regime areas,”] *Syrian Observatory for Human Rights*, July 19, 2020, [https://www.syriahr\(.\)com/%d9%85%d8%b9-%d8%a7%d8%b3%d8%aa%d9%85%d8%b1%d8%a7%d8%b1-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%ad%d9%85%d9%84%d8%a9-%d8%af%d9%8a%d8%b1-%d8%a7%d9%84/389118/](https://www.syriahr(.)com/%d9%85%d8%b9-%d8%a7%d8%b3%d8%aa%d9%85%d8%b1%d8%a7%d8%b1-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%ad%d9%85%d9%84%d8%a9-%d8%af%d9%8a%d8%b1-%d8%a7%d9%84/389118/).

¹⁶ [“Sheikhs of Deir ez-Zour to the General Commander: You Gave us our Dignity and we United our Path,”] *SDF Press*, July 15, 2020, [http://sdf-press\(.\)com/?p=32477](http://sdf-press(.)com/?p=32477).

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