

# الجزيرة

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## I Joined Them to Be Able to Do Civil Work

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“The revolution was peaceful” he added two dots “..”, then he continued, “we were working in media”, and he paused for a while before adding, “afterward the revolution was militarized”. His voice was barely audible, but I could access it and the feeling that what he was saying was not just some narrative, but it did not carry the usual taste of grief or of crying over the past. He was confident that the revolution is itself, whether it is militarized or not. It was a mother and he was the obedient son who was meant to love her in all her states. “We kept doing our nonviolent work but we started to coordinate with the armed wing”, he said before he reorganized his thoughts and began again: “I’m an only son in my family, I never trained or served in the army (..) and, one day, I was crossing the street with my friend, in between conversations, when he asked me to drop by with him to meet a person in the area. I met that person and discovered that he belongs to Jabhet al-Nusra. He told us about a training camp which was going to take place in Aleppo suburbs in a week. My curiosity was piqued and, it seemed to me, that this was an opportunity to get acquainted, up-close, with this horror that everyone is so terrified of”.

“And so I went to the camp and stayed there for 15 days. What’s strange is, despite the fact that I’m a secular person who doesn’t like Islamists, they had a very positive impact on me. Their training could be ranked as the best military training in Syria, strong and ideological training, which has been well studied and thought-out in all its facets.”

Then he went on to explain in more detail: “ they make their new members like Islam and they urge them to get

the idea of Jihad. They also protect the areas under their control from theft or the violations that civilians experience in some areas belonging to other military factions. They also take care of (ensure) the families of the Jihadists who join them and they continue to take care of the families of their martyrs (..) but I only went for training and knowledge. Afterward I left”, he ended his explanation emphasizing that he did not reach the rank of a Jihadist.

And what are the preconditions for joining al-Jabha? I asked him since it seemed to me, from his talk, that engaging with them is very easy and a flexible matter, unlike what the media is circulating about al-Jabha. “Acquaintances” he replied without hesitation. “Through acquaintances, relatives and people who are already members, in order for them to make sure the person is trustworthy,” he explained. And when I asked him how come he chose not to continue with them and why he was satisfied with just training, he responded: “I trained with them so I could learn from them and not to be like them”.

He was silent for a moment then added: “They are people with a doctrine that they believe in and they face difficulties for its sake”. He was silent for a second then went on: “Despite the fact that pure Islamic doctrine goes against my thoughts, I went to train there and I came to understand who they are and what they want from Syria, and that’s how the barrier of fear inside me was broken”.

“And what do they want from Syria?” I asked him before the line was cut off..

After a while he came back and apologized: “the network is weak”, and he went on to answer a previous question I had asked him in regard to his ability to withdraw from the organization and whether this had entailed any special

action against him: “ My situation was a bit unique in the sense that I was well-known for my work in the field of relief and in peaceful demonstrations primarily. Besides, I had told the person who let me in, before the training started, that I just wanted to train. So it was easy for me to leave after 15 days without any special action. But for those who join permanently, it might be harder for them to leave”.

I didn't need to repeat the question that came after, because he went on to say: “What do they want from Syria?” He was silent for a while as he appeared to organize what he wanted to phrase and he said: “ They want to plant a hotbed (or nest? or breeding ground? ) for themselves within a large project, longer term than one or two days”. I didn't quite understand, I told him. So he replied: “ it means they want to plant a political jihadist ideology that draws its strength from the doctrine itself.. Jihad against anyone or anything they choose depending on the proposed agenda at any moment in time. They want to prepare the popular incubator. The incubator is the most important thing.”

The line was cut off again before I had time to ask more questions but, this time, Abu Meshaal did not come back. This is the nickname of the civil activist from Aleppo suburbs. The following day, I got a short text from him which I think he had sent me earlier but was delayed when the line got cut off. The text read: “ I went to the military camp so I could become capable of defending myself. I wanted to establish relationships with them so they wouldn't harm me one day, and this way I can safely immerse myself in my civil activism”.

