

Quwat al-Ghadab: A Pro-Assad Christian Militia in Suqaylabiyah

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Social media graphic for Quwat al-Ghadab (no official insignia/emblems in existence). Another appellation used in reference to these forces is Junud al-Masih ('Soldiers of Christ').

Christians in the east of Syria, where Syriac liturgy denominations constitute the majority of Christians, are primarily known to have joined militias of Syriac orientation, such as the pro-regime Sootoro/Gozarto Protection Forces based in Qamishli and the pro-PYD administration Sutoro affiliated with the Syriac Union Party. Closely linked to the Sutoro is the Syriac Military Council, which is affiliated with the Mesopotamia National Council. In the west of Syria, the main militia known to have attracted Christian support is the Nusur al-Zawba'a (Eagles of the Whirlwind) of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP), which is aligned with the regime and has engaged on a variety of fronts throughout

A more local formation of interest in the west of Syria is Quwat al-Ghadab ('The Forces of Rage'), which is based in the Christian (specifically Greek Orthodox) town of Suqaylabiyah in northwestern Hama province. Suqaylabiyah is known as a base of support for the regime and hosts multiple political and military actors on the regime side, including a local branch of the National Defence Forces (NDF) and a local branch of the SSNP.*** According to one representative for Quwat al-Ghadab, the militia's founding dates to 16 March 2013 in order to defend Suqaylabiyah and its countryside, and it is affiliated with the Republican Guard and the general command for Syria's army and armed forces. Some posts also point to links with Syrian air intelligence, such as this notification on the New Year for 2016 featuring a Syrian air intelligence logo:



"We ask our people in the town of Suqaylabiyah not to celebrate the advent of 2016 with gunfire and take the foremost measures of caution and safeguarding. And this is not out of fear of terrorism on their part but rather to preserve your safety. And the men of al-Ghadab, of the sleepless eye, are in utmost readiness and at points of confrontation in their correct places, ready to respond and resist in order to protect the beloved Suqlab, the town of steadfastness. We will not let them pass except as lifeless corpses."

The representative further claimed that Quwat al-Ghadab has 163 martyrs and has fought on all fronts, likely reflecting exaggerations. From the open source data, the engagements seem to be primarily confined to areas in relative proximity to Suqaylabiyah. For example, Quwat al-Ghadab was involved in the defence of Tel Othman against rebel forces, which captured Tel Othman in early November 2015. During the Tel Othman, Quwat al-Ghadab lost at least one fighter in a person called Hadi Adnan al-Adli (also known as Hadi al-Adlah):



Invitation to a commemoration of Hadi al-Adlah in Suqaylabiyah on 11 December 2015, 40 days after his death. The imagery is common for Christian 'martyrs' who have died fighting for regime forces in the Syrian civil war.



Note the tattoo of the cross on his arm. Posts on Hadi's personal Facebook account suggest he was a devoted Christian. For example, in a [post on 22 September 2015](#), he called on Jesus to have mercy on him, describing himself as his 'servant in error [/sin].'

More recently, Quwat al-Ghadab has been operating in the mountains of Latakia, as illustrated by a post below from a member called Tony Nasab, who is identified in another post as [being in the ranks of the Republican Guard](#), pointing to the links mentioned above between Quwat al-Ghadab and the Republican Guard.



The leader of Quwat al-Ghadab is a man called Philip Suleiman, who appears to be particularly close to the leader of the Suqaylabiyah NDF branch Nabil (al-)Abdullah. A document from October 2014 gives a more precise outline of Philip Suleiman's role in Hama, pointing to his militia's function as a reserve force for the Syrian army in part to deal with issues of draft dodging, which became more apparent after the regime's losses in 2015 to rebels in Idlib and the refugee crisis:

"Syrian Arab Republic
General Command for the Army & Armed Forces
Brigade 47: Asdiqa'
No. 203
Date: 10 October 2014

Approved by the head of the security and military committee in Hama
Major General Jamal Mahmoud Younis

Mr. Philip Farid Suleiman from the town of Suqaylabiyah national ID number 05100010726 born in 1968 is entrusted with an official assignment by Quwat al-Asdiqa' and that is to draw in and recruit civilian personnel and those wanted for compulsory

and reserve service in the province of Hama for the interest of Quwat al-Asdiqa'. The security authorities are asked to provide the necessary aid and facilitation, thanking you for your cooperation.

Head of base."

Quwat al-Asdiqa' referenced in this document translates as 'The Forces of Friends'. The term can be found elsewhere in reference to auxiliary forces in places like Aleppo. Here, Quwat al-Asdiqa' is synonymous with Quwat al-Ghadab, as shown by the photo and posts below:



Philip Suleiman in his base. Note the plaque on the table: "Quwat al-Asdiqa': Regiment 45. Base leader: Philip Suleiman."



Post from March 2015, second paragraph: “The situation inside Suqaylabiyah is secure. There is no security incident inside the town and we ask all to beware only of any treachery that may strike Suqaylabiyah. The NDF, Quwat al-Asdiqa’ (Kata’ib al-Ghadab) and Nusur al-Zawba’a are spread in the interior and periphery of Suqaylabiyah and some of the neighbouring villages to observe any suspicious movement and deter it.”

Philip Suleiman came to greater attention in late March of this year when he was briefly detained by the regime. According to the Quwat al-Ghadab representative this author spoke with, he was arrested on accusations of smuggling diesel and petrol. His arrest sparked widespread outrage on the local social media and protests in the town:



شبكة اخبار السقيلية لحظة بلحظة added 2 new photos.

29 March -

سيارة الاسد ابو عدي فيليب سليمان وأثار دماثة عليها ..
وحوش حفظ النظام اعتقلوه بعد اطلاق الرصاص على سيارته!!!! لم يعفش احد ولم
يسرق احد ولم يدفع او يقبض رشاي من احد ولم يخون وطنه ومدينته .. فكرهه
الفاسدون ..
بدوووو يطلع ورأسه فوق وغضب ..
وكل كلب كتب تقرير كاذب فيه يبلو ويشرب ميتوو
حسابكم بس يرجع البطل .



"The car of the lion Abu Uday Philip Suleiman and traces of his blood on it. The beasts of the regime's security apparatus arrested him after opening fire on his car!!!! He has not hoarded anything, stolen from anyone, paid or taken bribes from anyone, or betrayed his homeland and town. So the corrupt people hated him. He will come out with his head high and in defiance, while every dog who has written a false report against him will taste and drink his death. On your reckoning, but the hero will return."



From the demonstrations in Suqaylabiyah that called for Philip Suleiman's release. One of the placards reads: "We are not terrorists. We are the Syrian Arab Army: Majmu'at al-Ghadab [the Rage Groups- another name for Quwat al-Ghadab]."



جنود المسيح added 3 new photos.

31 March - ✱

اعتصام مدني الان امام مديرية المنطقة في السقيلية للمطالبة بالافراج عن السيد فيليب سليمان ومعاقبة كاتب التقارير المزورة **التقيب** حسن عماد حسن الذي قام برفع عدة تقارير واصفا مجموعات الجوية المرابطة على النقاط المتقدمة بـ "الارهابيين" اثر خلاف شخصي مع قائد المجموعه فيليب سليمان عندما حاول فيليب منعه من اخذ كميات كبيرة من المحروقات من احدى كازيات السقيلية ليقوم بلاتجار بها وتهريبها و ايصال منها للمجموعات الارهابية المسلحة في المنطقة .. ليكمل عمله التامري على الوطن و جيش الوطن
من لديه اذان للسمع فليسمع ... سيدي الرئيس يا ابو الوطن و الفقرا منرفع صوتنا لك وحدك ... يلي عم يخارب و يضحي بدمو ليحمي الوطن عم يتبهذل و الجرامي عايش ملك ... وعلى الله يا وطن
#ابن_المسيح



"Civil demonstration now in front of the area directorate in Suqaylabiyah to demand the release of Mr. Philip Suleiman and punish the writer of the false reports Captain Hassan Imad Hassan who raised a number of reports describing the Jawiya groups [Suleiman's forces] maintaining the frontlines on the forward points as 'terrorists' as a result of a personal dispute with the group leader Philip Suleiman when Philip tried to prevent him from taking large quantities of fuel combustibles from one of the petrol stations of Suqaylabiyah in order to hoard them, smuggle them and deliver them to the armed terrorist groups in the area, in order to carry out his work of conspiracy against the homeland the army of the homeland." The placard in the photo on the left reads: "Captain Hassan!!! You have no place in our town of Suqaylabiyah."

Philip Suleiman was eventually released, and returned to Suqaylabiyah in a procession with greetings. No further incident has since come to light. Despite this brief flare-up of internal tensions, the town is unlikely to shift towards any sentiments of sympathy for the insurgency anytime soon, particularly as it has been subject to rebel bombardment

on multiple occasions, leading to the death of civilians. Moreover, from Kasab in Latakia to Qamishli in Hasakah, the record of the rebel groups and the Islamic State towards the Christian minorities is hardly reassuring.

***(**Appendix note on the SSNP**): The SSNP is known to exist in three distinct branches: a Syrian branch under Joseph Sweid, another Syrian branch under Reconciliation Minister Ali Hayder, and the Lebanese under As'ad Hardan. In terms of the Nusur al-Zawba'a output that is observed on social media, it can largely be traced to the efforts of Hardan's branch, which is indeed the main force organizing the Nusur al-Zawba'a militia effort in Syria. Thus, the best known Facebook page for Nusur al-Zawba'a- SSNPMediawars- and the associated Telegram channel show an affiliation with Hardan. For example, this post from 8 June 2016 on SSNPMediawars:



"The 'political direction' in the forces of 'Nusur al-Zawba'a' displays sections from a direction speech by the head of the party, secretary [general] As'ad Hardan inside one of the 'Nusur' camps."

Similarly, a page for the "Suqaylabiyah directorate" of the SSNP points to an affiliation with Hardan. Besides the military contribution in the form of the Nusur al-Zawba'a militia, there is also outreach to the local population, including the youth of Suqaylabiyah. It is therefore apparent that Hardan's SSNP has used the Syrian civil war to project influence into regime-held Syria, reflecting a wider trend among the militia actors on the regime side. Indeed, it fielded candidates in the parliamentary elections in April 2016.

In contrast, the Syrian SSNP under Sweid (the main focus for the comparison here) maintains its own Facebook page- [wssnpsy](https://www.facebook.com/wssnpsy). There is evidence for tensions between the Sweid Syrian and Lebanese SSNP branches inside Syria, as members of Nusur al-Zawba'a affiliated with the Lebanese SSNP attacked an office of Sweid's Syrian SSNP in Damascus, prompting a [condemnation from Sweid's Syrian SSNP issued on 14 June 2016](#). While Sweid's Syrian SSNP urged for its members not to be drawn into internal strife, it asked the Lebanese SSNP to condemn the assault, warning that failure to do so would lead to repeated incidents of this type and amount to approval/orders from the Lebanese SSNP.