

## Yara Saleh, hostage of the Free Syrian Army

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*Journalist of the privately-owned Al Ekhbariya TV channel, Yara Saleh was taken prisoner with her team by the Free Syrian Army. She was spared and held hostage while a large mobilization in Europe put pressure on the French President to order his FSA friends to release her. Rescued in the end by the Syrian national army, she agreed to respond to the questions of Voltaire Network.*



Hundreds of Free Syrian Army fighters, affiliated with different salafist and takfirist groups, converged on the city of Al-Tall, on July 20. The majority was not Syrian. Some pro-democracy residents welcomed them, thinking they shared a common objective. The fighters assaulted the police station and captured the policemen, injuring some. They allowed only those officials belonging to the Sunni branch of Islam to be transferred to hospital while barring the others from receiving treatment. Swiftly, the new Al-Tall Revolutionary Council imposed sectarian rule. The population fled the city, starting with those who had welcomed the FSA, deluded with Western promises.

The fighters took hostage some thirty civilians, including an *Al-Akhbariya* television crew which had arrived on the scene, then they holed up inside the city. The hostages were dispersed in different buildings, and were moved around each day. While the fighters had intended to establish an Islamic Emirate there, the Revolutionary Council—commanded by a Syrian defector—was informed of an imminent attack by the national army. In one video, he threatened to kill the journalists and demanded the removal of the roadblocks encircling the city to be able to get away. Obtaining no satisfaction, he received an order by satellite phone to move his unit to another locality. On the night of August 15, some 500 to 700 men—taking with them their most valuable hostages—exited in single file through the countryside. Then, all of a sudden, several rockets lit up the night allowing the national army to open fire and stamp out more than 200 jihadists in minutes.

Al-Akhbariya journalist Yarah Saleh, detained for six days, had the reflex to throw herself down on the floor to protect herself. The other hostages, who had remained trapped in the city, were located the following morning and liberated.

Here is Yara Saleh's testimony, recorded a few hours after her ordeal.

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