THE ANDREW MARR SHOW

INTERVIEW:

ABUBAKER DEGHAYES

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ANDREW MARR:
Now three brothers from Brighton went to war in Syria this year. Only one of them is still alive. It fell to him, Amer Deghayes, to contact his father last week with the news that his little brother, 17 year old Jaffar, had been killed by pro-Assad forces. Jaffar’s death comes only 6 months after 18 year old Abdullah was killed. Amer, who is 20, spoke on Friday about his determination to remain abroad as a fighter. The father of the three men, Abubaker Deghayes, joins me now. Mr Deghayes, thank you very much indeed for joining us. Commiserations on your terrible loss as a family. You’ve got one son who is determined to carry on fighting and we can hear him, I think, speaking on the television just now.

ITV NEWS CLIP: AMER DEGHAYES:
This is a very large project. It’s not … it’s not like a small time thing. This may take years and I would wish to take part in it the whole way, right until I get killed. I am willing to die in the path of Allah. That’s my main aim. I have promised Allah that I will stay on the way of Jihad until I get killed.

ANDREW MARR:
Now three brothers, they were all radicalised. You yourself, I think, were in Syria quite a lot on humanitarian convoys. Were you surprised by what happened to them? Did you notice it happening to them?
ABUBAKER DEGHAYES:
Well, first of all, I do not agree with the word ‘radicalised’. My sons were not radicalised. My sons … My sons went. They did a mistake. They were naïve to think that going to Syria and fighting will make a change. That’s their way of translating trying to release the Syrians from their suffering. But I don’t consider it radicalisation. I consider it out of their kindness, out of their humanity and conscience. That’s why they took this step. But at the same time what they did is not right, they miscalculated it, because the Syrians do not need foot fighters. They need much more complicated things than that to win their war against Assad and stop these atrocities. They need anti-aircraft weapons, they need the United Nations to impose a no fly zone. They need powerful governments like the West to stop Assad from his craziness and get him to leave the Syrians alone. So by going there and being just a foot soldier was a miscalculation by my sons and I ask all the youngsters not to do the same.

ANDREW MARR:
Because a lot of people will say that … One of your sons I think was involved in a group affiliated with al-Qaeda. Once you get into Syria, you can be then drawn into more and more vicious groups and ultimately the IS itself. Is that part of your message to Muslims who think I’m just going to go there to help?

ABUBAKER DEGHAYES:
No actually there’s a big difference here. You’re mixing so many things - as usual the media does - you know which do not come together. The message is that don’t go to Syria because you will not, by fighting with them as a person, you will not add anything. They’re a population of 30 million. They’ve been known historically brave fighters. They need weapons, they need ammunition, they need etcetera - other things like that. But the issue of ISIS and my sons are fighting with al-Nusra Front, which is a group listed by the West as affiliated to al-Qaeda. They did not go there to join this group, but they went there and they found that this is the group which has the best credential, the more discipline. The Syrians see them as heroes. They don’t entangle themselves inside issues. They concentrate on fighting Assad. ISIS is another group, okay, which is built on hate and revenge ideology. ISIS came from Iraq and fell into Syria. They were founded by a guy called Abu Musab al-Zarkawi.
ANDREW MARR:
Indeed.

ABUBAKER DEGHAYES:
These are the by-product of the foreign policies which we have been doing for decades because when you commit injustice or you support oppressors against people, this will come back and haunt you. Abu Musab al-Zarkawi is a Palestinian gentleman, Palestinian man who …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) I’m not sure he’s a gentleman, but …

ABUBAKER DEGHAYES:
(over) … inherited all the injustices which happened to the Palestinians …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Okay, alright. One of the …

ABUBAKER DEGHAYES:
(over) … in occupied Palestine, you know, and his grandparents…

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Sure. One of the big issues for the British Government at the moment is how do you treat people who have gone to fight in Syria for whatever group and then want to come home again because a lot of people watching will say well these are people who are therefore by definition dangerous, we shouldn’t let them back into this country. What would be your message to the government about that?

ABUBAKER DEGHAYES:
My message to the government is simple and clear. First of all, look at the issue without your prejudice. Look as these are your sons. Families are in situations. Don’t look at it as enemies and terrorism. Look first that these are youngsters who are British, who are born here, who are from this country; we invested the most in them.
So from this point you start. And also it’s very important that we have an exit strategy for whoever wants to come back, when he comes back that he will be you know seen and he will be put in a project if it’s needed, so that we remedy whatever wrong he learnt or he went with.

ANDREW MARR:
And perhaps stop other people going out there?

ABUBAKER DEGHAYES:
That’s strategy for the people who are out there, okay?

ANDREW MARR:
Yes.

ABUBAKER DEGHAYES:
And not to keep on adding to the threat and closing the doors and building a brick wall not to come back; that you will be tried for draconian law which has been under us for years for treason.

ANDREW MARR:
Okay.

ABUBAKER DEGHAYES:
For the people who want to go or thinking of going there …

ANDREW MARR:
*(over)* We have to stop them, yes.

ABUBAKER DEGHAYES:
… youngsters, we should have a parallel programme to teach our youngsters that in calamities like this – in wars and like what’s happening in Syria – there are ways to help engage yourself in fundraising, engage yourself in lobbying the government …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Yes okay.

**ABUBAKER DEGHAYES:**
… engage yourself in aid work, engage yourself in educating the public and
*(inaudible)* support.

**ANDREW MARR:**
*(over)* But not fighting. Okay, well thank you very much indeed for joining us. I’m very sorry for your loss. Thanks so much for joining us.

**ABUBAKER DEGHAYES:**
Thank you very much.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**