No less than 898 Attacks on Vital Civilian Facilities in Syria in 2017

Including 53 in December

Monday, January 8, 2018

The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), founded in June 2011, is a non-governmental, independent group that is considered a primary source for the OHCHR on all death toll-related analyses in Syria.

SNHR
SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

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I. Introduction

The bombardment and what it entails of systematic killing and destruction by the ruling regime seems to aim mainly to undermine the establishment of any alternative governing system. Also, it leads to residents displacing from opposition-held areas to the regime-held areas which are relatively safer.

If the Security Council is unable to bind the conflict parties to implement Resolution 2139, adopted on February 22, 2016, which states: “Demands that all parties immediately cease all attacks against civilians, as well as the indiscriminate employment of weapons in populated areas, including shelling and aerial bombardment, such as the use of barrel bombs”, it should at least apply pressure mainly on Syrian regime forces to cease attacks against vital facilities such as schools, hospitals, markets, bakeries, and places of worship.

On December 30, 2016, a comprehensive ceasefire was announced from the Turkish capital Ankara under a Russian-Turkish sponsorship. The signing parties, the Syrian regime on one side and armed opposition factions on the other side, agreed to cease all armed attacks, including airstrikes, and stop raids and on-the-ground advancements. The military areas controlled by ISIS (self-proclaimed the Islamic State) were excluded from the agreement.

Ankara Ceasefire Agreement was followed by seven rounds of talks that were held in Astana, Kazakhstan's capital, between Russian, Turkish, and Iranian representatives as the states who sponsored Ankara Ceasefire Agreement. These rounds -the most recent of which was on October 30-31, 2017- discussed mostly, in parallel with a number of local agreements, ways to further establish de-escalation zones in Idlib governorate and the surrounding areas (parts of Aleppo, Hama, and Latakia governorates), northern Homs governorate, Eastern Ghouta, and parts of Daraa and Quneitra governorates in south Syria. Additionally, the talks addressed ways to deliver humanitarian aids and enable IDPs to return to those areas. Since these agreements went into effect, the included areas saw a relatively good and noticeable drop in killing rates in relation to the past months since March 2011.

Despite Ankara Ceasefire Agreement and the de-escalation agreements that followed, breaches didn't stop, mainly by the Syrian regime, who is seemingly the party that would be most affected should the ceasefire go on, and in particular extrajudicial killing crimes and, more horrendously, deaths due to torture. This strongly asserts that there is a ceasefire of some sort on the table, but the crimes that the international community -especially the guarantors- won't see are still going on as nothing had changed.

A de-escalation agreement was reached in Eastern Ghouta between Jaish al Islam, an armed opposition faction, and Russian forces under an Egyptian sponsorship on Saturday, July 22, 2017, and was followed by a similar agreement with Failaq al Rahman faction that established the faction's inclusion in the de-escalation zone in Eastern Ghouta on Wednesday, August 16, 2017. Nonetheless, Syrian-Russian alliance have initiated a vicious offensive against Eastern Ghouta on the 14th of last November. We released a report, "The Barbarian Bombardment and Siege on Eastern Ghouta Practically Invalidates the Upcoming Geneva Round", documenting the most notable violations by the Syrian-Russian alliance between November 14-27, 2017.

Methodology

SNHR implements a high-level documentation methodology. In this report, SNHR sheds light on the most notable attacks against vital civilian facilities by the parties to the conflict that we have been able to document. We retain the details of all incidents in our database. Verification for these incidents is chiefly carried out through our researches who are scattered across Syrian governorates with the cooperation and coordination of the local residents and activists. This report includes one account. It should be noted that this is the

bare minimum in light of the many practical obstructions we encounter during documentations. SNHR can confirm, through its investigations, that there were no military centers in the centers mentioned in the report before or during the attacks. The Syrian regime, and other perpetrators, are going to have to justify their actions before the United Nations and the Security Council.

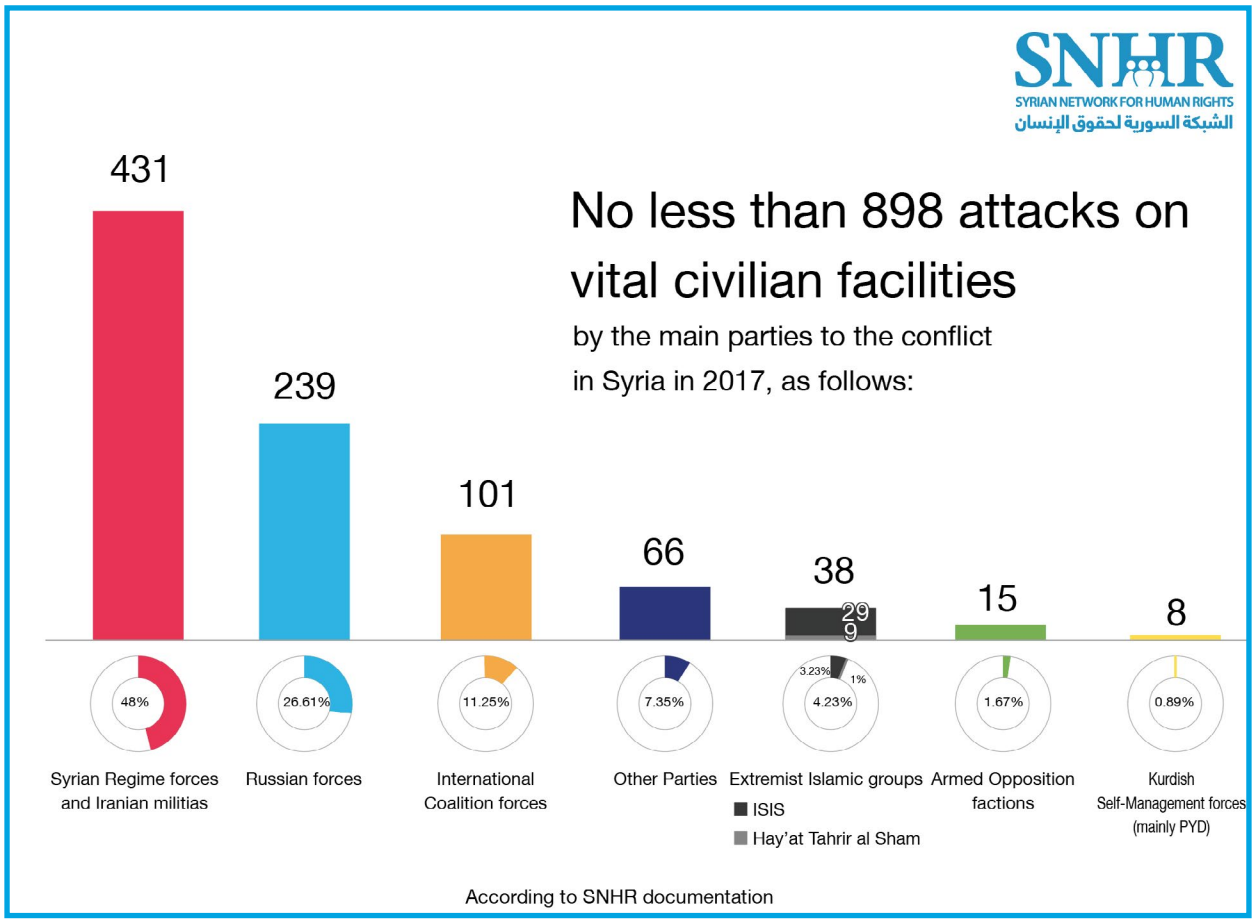
The type and number of evidences vary from one case to another. In light of the challenges we mentioned above, many of the incidents' legal description change based on new evidences or clues that surface after we had released the report. We add these evidences and clues to our data archive. On the other hand, many incidents don't constitute a violation to the international humanitarian law, but it involved collateral damages, so we record and archive these incidents to know what happened historically and to preserve it as a national record. However, they don't necessarily qualify as crimes.

You can read the methodology adopted by SNHR in classifying vital civilian facilities on this URL

II. Executive Summary

A. Attacks on vital civilian facilities in 2017

Through daily documentation and monitoring, we, at SNHR, have documented no less than 898 attacks on vital civilian facilities in 2017, distributed as follows:



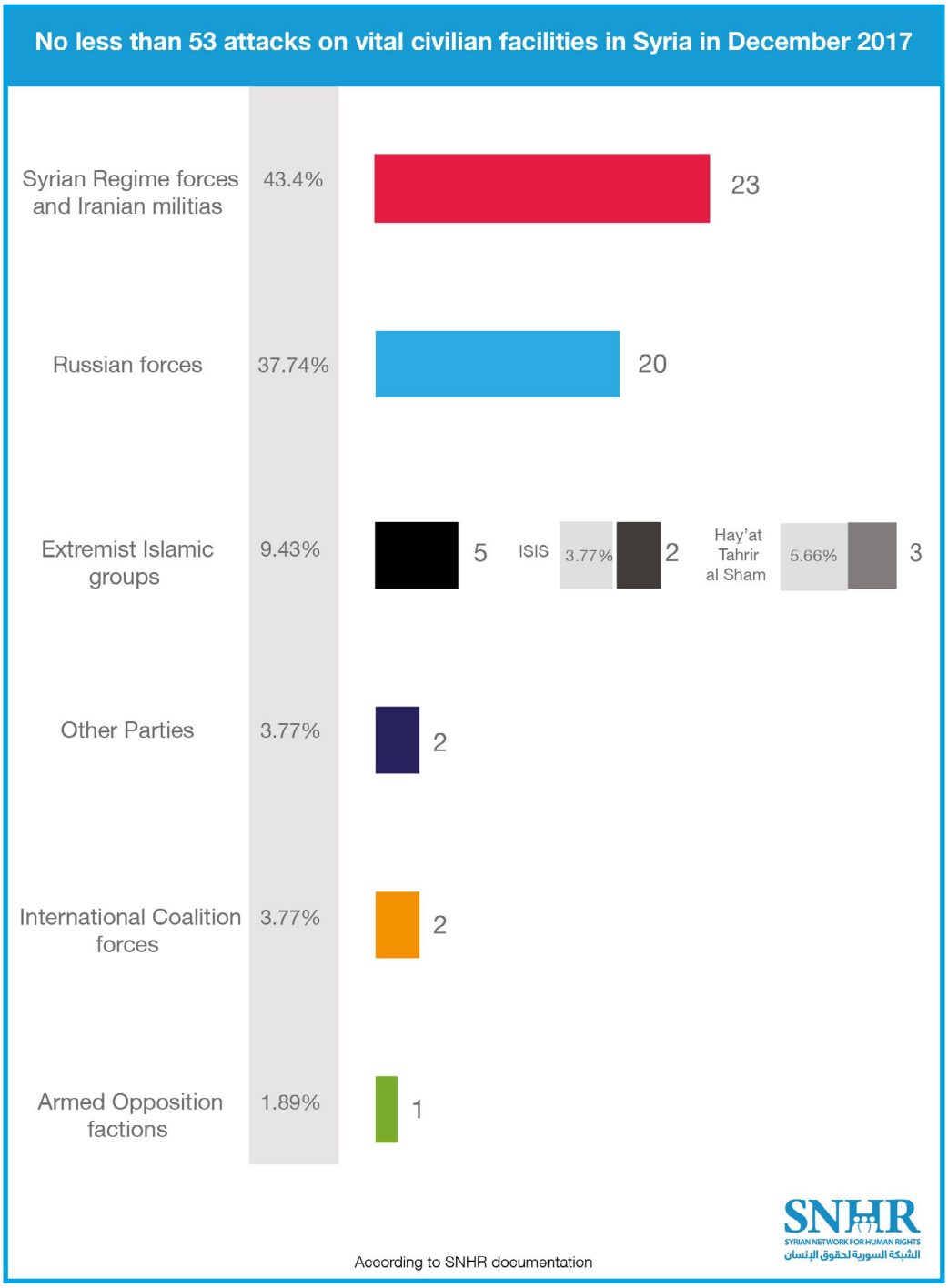
- Most notable facilities that were attacked in 2017

301 infrastructures, 182 places of worship, 170 vital educational facilities, 139 vital medical facilities, 69 communal facilities, 11 international humanitarian insignia, 22 refugee camps, and four vital cultural facilities.

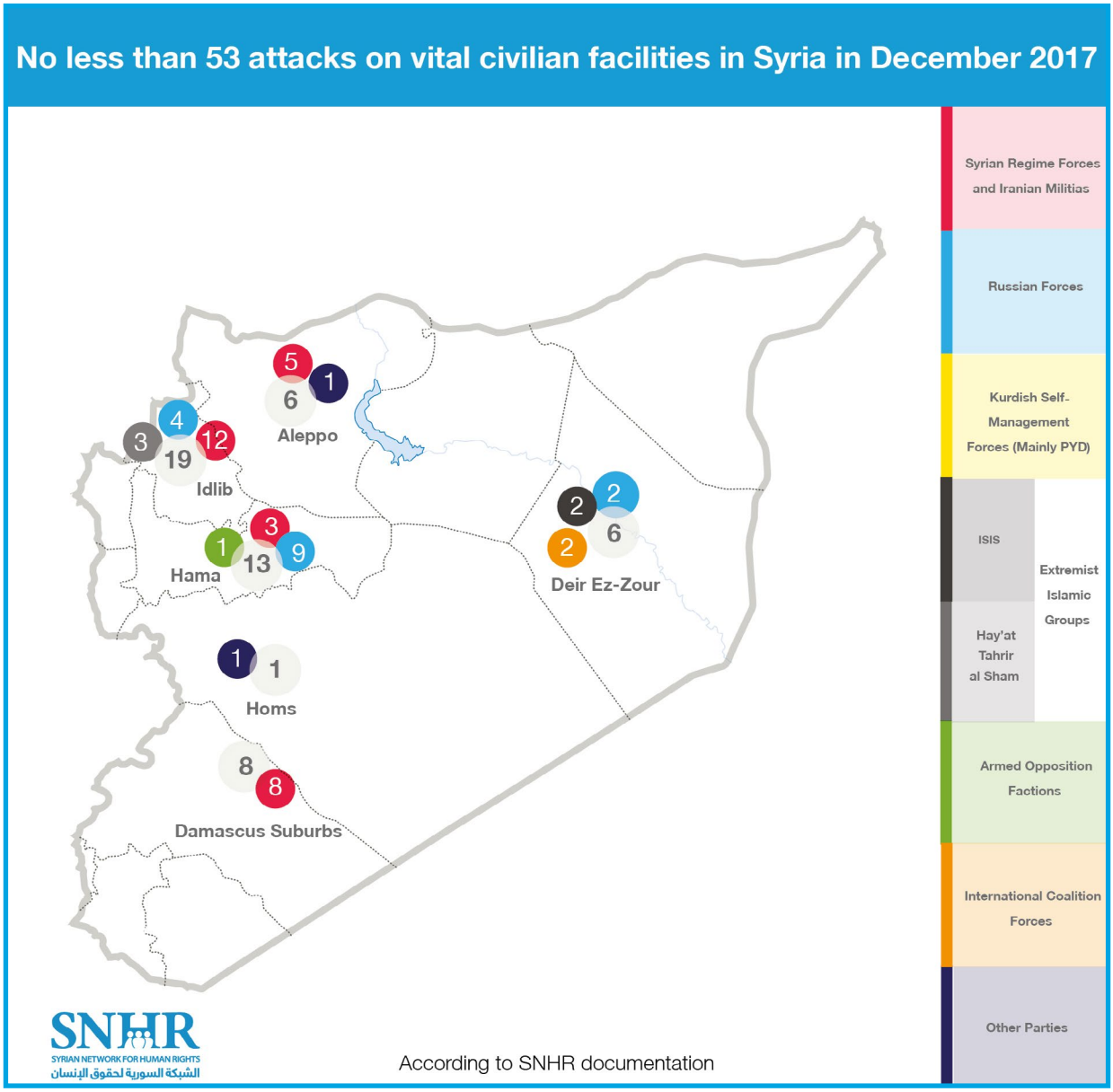
Distribution of Attacks on Vital Civilian Facilities in 2017 by the Perpetrator Party								
Perpetrator Party / Targeted Facility	Syrian Regime Forces	Russian Forces	Extremist Islamic Groups		Factions from the Armed Opposition	Kurdish Self-Management Forces	International Coalition Forces	Other Parties
			ISIS	Hay'at Tahrir al Sham				
Places of Worship								
Mosques	106	36		1	1	3	25	10
Vital Educational Facilities								
Schools	70	38	6	1	5		18	8
Kindergartens	10							1
Universities	2	1		3	2			2
Institutes								1
Orphanages	2							
Vital Medical Facilities								
Medical Facilities	37	47			1	2	7	7
Ambulances	18	16			1			3
Vital Cultural Facilities								
Archeological Sites	2	1					1	
Communal Facilities								
Gardens	1							
Markets	49	11			1		4	2
Stadiums								1
International Humanitarian Insignia								
Red Crescent	3	1			1			6
Infrastructures								
Power Stations and Energy Sources	4	7	3		2	1	3	1
Civil Defense Facilities	59	28						6
Water Systems	7	3	17			1	9	
Official Headquarters	19	15	1	4	1		9	13
Transportation Systems	15	18					17	1
Bakeries	10	7	1				6	1
Silos	1							
Domestic Animal Farms	1							
International Organizations and Locations Belonging to International Agencies			1					
Industrial Facilities	2	6						1
Refugee Camps								
Refugee Camps	13	4				1	2	2
Total	431	239	29	9	15	8	101	66

B. Attacks on Vital Civilian Facilities in December

Through daily documentation and monitoring at SNHR, we recorded no less than 53 attacks on vital civilian facilities in December 2017, distributed by the perpetrator party as follows:



Attacks on vital civilian facilities in December were distributed by governorate as follows:



Most notable facilities that were targeted in December 2017

15 infrastructures, 12 places of worship, 10 vital educational facilities, seven vital medical facilities, four communal facilities, four refugee camps, and one international humanitarian insignia.

Distribution of Targeted Vital Civilian Facilities by the Perpetrator Party in December 2017							
Perpetrator Party / Targeted Facility	Syrian Regime Forces	Russian Forces	Extremist Islamic Groups		Factions from the Armed Opposition	International Coalition Forces	Other Parties
			ISIS	Hay'at Tahrir al Sham			
Places of Worship							
Mosques	4	6				1	1
Vital Educational Facilities							
Schools	3	3			1		1
Kindergartens	2						
Vital Medical Facilities							
Medical Facilities	2	3					
Ambulances		2					
Communal Facilities							
Markets	2	1				1	
International Humanitarian Insignia							
Red Crescent	1						
Infrastructures							
Civil Defense Facilities	2	2					
Water Systems	2		1				
Official Headquarters	2			3			
Transportation Systems		1					
Bakeries		1	1				
Refugee Camps							
Refugee Camps	3	1					
Total:	23	20	2	3	1	2	2

III.Details of Most Notable Incidents in December

The report sheds light on most notable incidents of attack against vital civilian facilities in December except for the details of the attacks on vital medical facilities, civil defense centers, and international humanitarian insignia which were put in a past monthly report: "112 Medical, Civil Defense, and Red Crescent Personnel Killed, and 243 Attacks on Their Vital Facilities in Syria in 2017"

A. Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, and Shiite foreign militias)

Places of worship

- Mosques

Thursday, December 14, 2017, around 10:30, Syrian regime forces artillery fired a shell near Zamalka Grand Mosque in Zamalka town, Eastern Ghouta, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate, which resulted in casualties. Additionally, the mosque building was moderately damaged. The town was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

Friday, December 29, 2017, Syrian regime forces helicopters dropped a number of barrel bombs on al Rahman Mosque in Mazra'at Skayyat, located near al Taman'a town, southern suburbs of Idlib governorate. The mosque building was heavily destroyed and its furniture was heavily damaged as the mosque was rendered out of commission. The area was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

Vital educational facilities

- Schools

Thursday, December 28, 2017, Syrian regime forces helicopters dropped a number of barrel bombs on a school area, where the intermediate school and high school are located, in eastern Babolin village, southern suburbs of Idlib governorate. The two school buildings were partially destroyed and their furniture was heavily damaged. The village was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

-Kindergartens

Sunday, December 3, 2017, Syrian regime forces artillery fired a number of shells near Iqra Kindergarten in southern Saqba city, Eastern Ghouta, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate. The kindergarten building was partially destroyed and its furniture was moderately damaged as the kindergarten was rendered out of commission. The city was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

Communal facilities

- Markets

Friday, December 22, 2017, Syrian regime forces artillery fired a number of shells at the local market in Douma city, Eastern Ghouta, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate. A number of shops were moderately damaged. The city was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

Damages in the aftermath of a shelling by Syrian regime forces on the local market in Douma city, Damascus suburbs – December 22, 2017

Infrastructures

- Water systems

Friday, December 29, 2017, Syrian regime forces artillery fired four shells that landed near the only drinking-water tank in al Latamena town, northwestern suburbs of Hama governorate. The shells landed about 30 meters away from the tank with no damages to the tank. It should be noted that the same tank was heavily damaged in a shelling by the same artillery on Tuesday, December 26, 2017. The town was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

-Official headquarters

Monday, December 25, 2017, Syrian regime forces helicopters dropped a number of barrel bombs on the Free Police Station in the middle of Jarjanaz town, eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate. The barrel bombs landed 100 meters away from the station with no damages recorded in its building. It should be noted that the Free Police uses the former town hall in Jarjanaz town as a base. The town was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

Refugee camps

Monday, December 25, 2017, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired one missile at al Zafar IDPs camp in western Abu al Thohour town, eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate. About 15 tents were moderately damaged. The town was under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

B. Russian forces

Places of worship

- Mosques

Tuesday, December 5, 2017, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a number of missiles at al Hashish Mosque in al Sha'fa city, which is administratively a part of al Boukamal city, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The mosque building was moderately damaged. The city was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Friday, December 8, 2017, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a missile at "al Zarzour village" mosque in al Tamane'a town, southern suburbs of Idlib governorate. The mosque building was heavily destroyed and its furniture was heavily damaged as the mosque was rendered out of commission. The village was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

Destruction in the aftermath of a bombing by Russian forces on al Zarzour village mosque, Idlib – December 8, 2017

Wednesday, December 13, 2017, around 10:00, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a number of missiles in the vicinity of Tal al Daman Mosque in western Tal al Daman village, southern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. One of the missiles landed on the mosque as the mosque building was heavily destroyed and tis furniture was rendered out of commission. As a result, the mosque was rendered out of commission. It should be noted that the same mosque was attacked by the same warplanes on Saturday, December 9, 2017. The village was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

Destruction in the aftermath of a bombing by Russian forces on Tal al Daman Mosque in Tal al Daman village, Aleppo – December 13, 2017

We contacted Ramadan Hasan al Mohammad[1] , a civil defense worker in Barda village. Ramadan told us that the observatories announced on the morning of Wednesday, December 13 that Russian warplanes fired two highly-explosive missiles in Tal al Daman village: **"We immediately headed for the site. We found out that the bombing targeted Tal al Daman mosque – the same mosque that was targeted a few days ago. The destruction was huge in the mosque and the signs of destruction was also visible on approximately 14 houses in its vicinity as well. The destruction was huge. We couldn't find any missile remnants."** Ramadan added that the area is almost empty of any residents in light of the heavy bombardment.

[1] We contacted him via WhatsApp

Monday, December 18, 2017, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired four missiles at "al Bayoud village" mosque. The village is administratively a part of al Hamra county, eastern suburbs of Hama governorate. The mosque building was destroyed almost completely as the mosque was rendered out of commission. It should be noted that the same warplanes attacked the same mosque on Tuesday, December 5, 2017. The village was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

Al Bayoud village mosque before and after it was bombed by Russian forces in al Bayoud village, Hama – December 12, 2017

Vital educational facilities

- Schools

Saturday, December 9, 2017, around 08:00, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a missile near Jab Elies Elementary School in Jab Elies village, southern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. The missile landed about three meters away from the school building which was partially destroyed along with the fence. As a result, the school was rendered temporarily out of commission. The village was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

Communal facilities

- Markets

Sunday, December 17, 2017, around 14:50, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a missile at the main market in the middle of Khan Sheikhoun city, southern suburbs of Idlib governorate. A number of shops were partially destroyed. The city was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

Infrastructures

- Transportation systems

Friday, December 1, 2017, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a number of missiles at the water crossing in al Twatha village which is administratively a part of al Boukamal city, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The bombardment resulted in a massacre. Additionally, a number of ferries and boats were destroyed. It should be noted that the crossing connects between al Twatha village and the other villages in al Boukamal area (Jazira). The village was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

- Bakeries

Wednesday, December 6, 2017, around 06:00, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired two missiles at the bakery in western Abu al Thohour town, eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate. The bakery building was partially destroyed and its equipment was moderately damaged as the bakery was rendered out of commission. The town was under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

Destruction in the aftermath of a bombing by Russian forces on the bakery in Abu al Thohour town, Idlib – December 6, 2017

C. Extremist Islamic groups

- ISIS

Infrastructures

- Water systems

Sunday, December 24, 2017, ISIS used IEDs to bomb the high water tank in Abu Hardoub village, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The tank was destroyed completely and rendered out of commission. As a result, the water was cut off in parts of the village. The village was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

- Hay'at Tahrir al Sham

Infrastructures

- Official headquarters

Tuesday, December 19, 2017, Hay'at Tahrir al Sham fighters raided the Seed Propagation Office, which is affiliated to Hama governorate, in al Habeit village, southern suburbs of Idlib governorate. The fighters seized the office equipment and shut it down with locks. The village was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

D. Armed opposition factions

Vital educational facilities

- Schools

Thursday, December 28, 2017, a rocket landed on Mukhles Omar Jamal al Din School in al Baath neighborhood, northwestern Hama city. We believe the rocket was fired from a rocket launcher stationing in an armed opposition-held area. The school yard was moderately damaged. The neighborhood was under the control of Syrian regime forces at the time of the incident.

E. International coalition forces

Places of worship

- Mosques

Tuesday, December 5, 2017, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a missile at an ISIS-affiliated car near al Tu'ma Mosque, known as al Mufleh Mosque, in al Jarthi al Sharqi village, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The mosque building was heavily damaged as the mosque was rendered out of commission. The village was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

F. Other parties

Places of worship

- Mosques

Friday, December 15, 2017, an IED exploded inside the Grand Mosque in Taldao town, northwestern suburbs of Homs governorate. The mosque building and its furniture were moderately damaged. As of this writing, we have yet to identify the group behind the bombing due to the difficulty in determining the responsible party in such bombings. The city was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

IV. Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

According to the international humanitarian law, indiscriminate, deliberate, or disproportionate attacks are considered as unlawful attacks. Syrian regime forces' attacks against schools, hospitals, mosques, and bakeries is an utter disregard for the most basic standards of the international humanitarian law and the Security Council Resolution.

Additionally, Russian forces, ISIS, Hay'at Tahrir al Sham, factions from the armed opposition, international coalition forces, Self-Management forces, and other parties (Includes groups that we weren't able to identify and the Turkish, Lebanese, and Jordanian forces) have attacked some of these facilities. The indiscriminate random shelling is a violation of the international humanitarian law and amounts to a war crime.

Recommendations

The Security Council

1- Bind all parties, especially Syrian regime forces considering that they are the main perpetrator of most of these violations, to implement Resolution 2139 and, at least, condemn the targeting of vital civilian facilities that are indispensable for the lives of civilians.

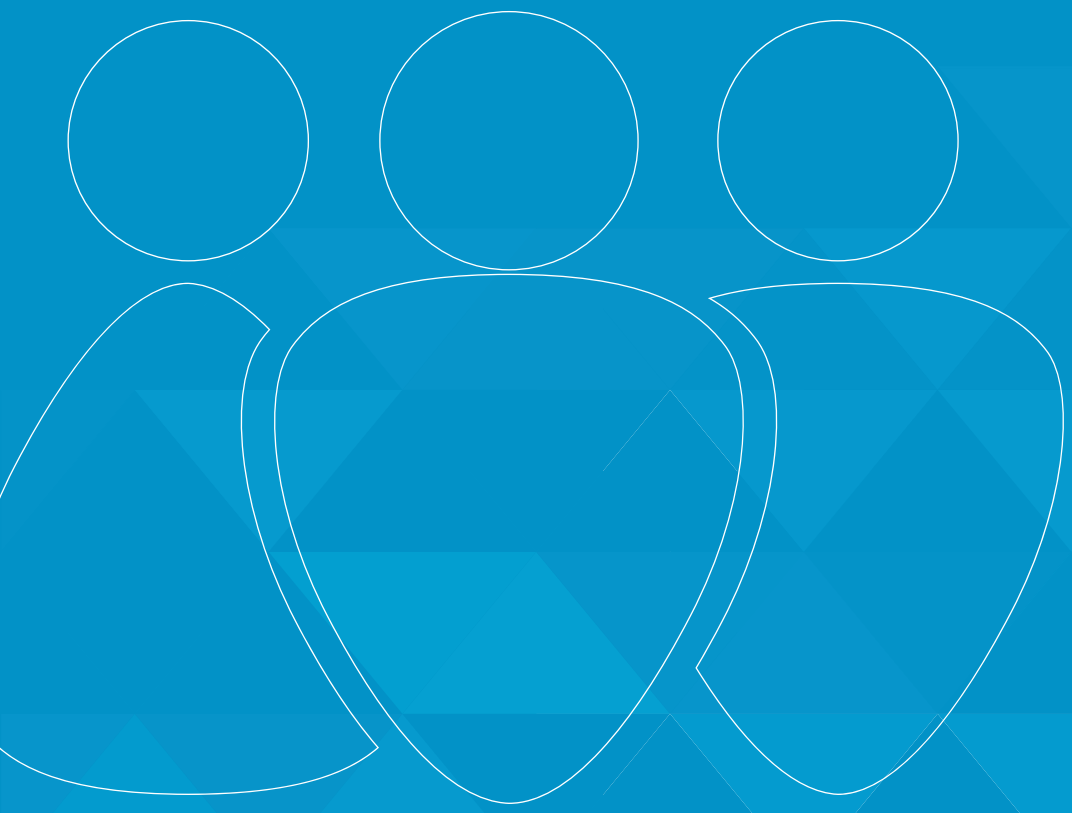
2- A comprehensive arms embargo must be imposed on the Syrian government as it has been involved in gross violations of international laws and Security Council Resolutions.

3- Deem the states that supply Syrian regime forces and groups that have been involved in crimes against civilians with weapons partners in these crimes in addition to all supplies and distributors.

The Russian guarantor

1- The Syrian regime has to be stopped from dooming the de-escalation agreements. Otherwise, it will only be seen as an exchange of roles between the Russian regime, on one side, and the Syrian/Russian alliance on the other side.

2- Start making progress in the detainees issue by revealing the fates of 76,000 forcibly-disappeared persons at the hands of the Syrian regime.



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