

# No less than 61 Incidents of Attack on Vital Civilian Facilities in October 2017

Including 57 at the Hands of  
the Syrian-Russian Alliance

# SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

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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.



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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.



The fourth round of negotiations was held in Astana city, Kazakhstan's capital, on 3 and 4 of May 2017. Russian, Turkish, and Iranian representatives attended as the sponsoring states of Ankara Ceasefire Agreement. The three states agreed on establishing four de-escalation zones, wherein the agreement is to commence on May 6, 2017. The agreement outlined four major areas for the de-escalation in Idlib governorate and the surrounding areas (parts of Aleppo, Hama, and Latakia governorates), northern Homs governorate, Eastern Ghouta, and parts of Daraa and al Quneitra governorates in the southern parts of Syria. It was provided that a special committee would accurately assign the borders of said zones at a later date. The agreement provided for a cessation of combat operations, passage of humanitarian aids, and for IDPs to go back to their areas.

Following an extensive round of talks between Russia, USA, and Jordan that commenced in May 2017 in Amman, Jordan's capital, the American and Russian presidents announced, on the sidelines of the 2017 G20 summit in Hamburg, that a ceasefire agreement has been reached in southwestern Syria – Daraa, Quneitra, and Suwayda governorates. The agreement went into force at 12:00 on Sunday July 9, 2017, and provided for the passage of humanitarian aids in addition to a ceasefire between the conflicting parties (Syrian regime forces and their allies on one side, and armed opposition factions on the other side). Also, the agreement specifies that maintaining security in this region is the Russian forces' responsibility in coordination with the Americans and Jordanians.

In addition, there have been a number of other local agreements in July and August 2017, such as Eastern Ghouta agreement between armed opposition factions, on one side, and officials from the Russian side, while a similar agreement was struck with the opposition in northern suburbs of Homs. However, the [texts of these agreements](#) haven't been made public on Russian government's websites, and the same for armed opposition factions who didn't publicize these agreements, except for Failaq al Rahman who published the text of the agreement on their official website. At the end of the agreement, according to the copy on Failaq al Rahman's website, a signature by a Russian sponsor was shown but without an explicit name, which was a grave mistake, as apparently all of this helps the sponsoring Russian side to easily dissolve from these agreements with no subsequent political or legal obligations and repercussions.

On Saturday, July 22, 2017, Russian Ministry of Defense announced that a de-escalation agreement has been signed in Eastern Ghouta following a round of talks between Russian military officials, on one side, and Jaish al Islam faction, on the other side, in Egypt's capital Cairo. The agreement was to come into effect at 12:00 of the same day. On Wednesday,



August 16, 2017, a Failaq al Rahman representative and a Russian representative signed an agreement in Geneva city that established Failaq al Rahman's inclusion in the de-escalation zone in Eastern Ghouta. The agreement was to come into effect at 21:00 of Friday, August 18, 2017.

On Monday, July 31, 2017, another de-escalation agreement was signed in Egypt's capital Cairo for northern Homs suburbs and southern Hama suburbs following a round of talks between armed opposition factions in the area and the Syrian regime represented by the Russian government as a sponsoring party, as the agreement was to commence at 12:00 on Thursday, August 3, 2017.

Most notably, the two most recent agreements provided for a full cessation of hostilities between the conflicting parties in the relevant areas -with the exclusion of the areas in which ISIS and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham are present- and for humanitarian aids to enter these areas and for detainees to be released as per the demands of each party as to which detainees are to be released.

Since these agreements commenced, the included areas have seen a relatively good and significant drop in rates of killing and attacks on vital civilian facilities, in relation to the previous months since March 2011.

Despite all of this, breaches haven't stopped, 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.

With the end of the sixth round of talks in the Kazakhstani capital, Astana, which were held over the course of two days (September 14-15, 2017), a de-escalation zone was [established](#) in Idlib governorate and the surrounding areas, as military forces were to be deployed (Russian, Turkish, and Iranian) to monitor the agreement, with the passage of humanitarian aids.



On September 19, Syrian-Russian alliance started a heavy offensive against Idlib governorate in response to Hay'at Tahrir al Sham's "Ya Ebadallah Uthbotou" battle. Supported by some opposition faction (The Islamic Turkistani Party, Jaish al Izza, and Jaish al Nukhba), Hay'at Tahrir al Sham started this battle in northeastern Hama governorate, as they took over some villages, but Syrian regime forces, backed by Russian forces, managed to re-seize the same areas on the same day. We have released [a report](#) documenting the most notable violations of the first week of that offensive. Subsequently, these forces expanded the offensive to include the suburbs of Aleppo and Hama governorates and Eastern Ghouta in Damascus suburbs.

On October 8, 2017, Jaish al Islam, Aknaf Bait al Maqdis, and Jaish al Ababil (armed opposition factions) signed an agreement with a Russian Ministry of Defense representative in the Egyptian capital Cairo. [The agreement](#) stated that southern Damascus city would be added to the de-escalation zones, as the agreement was to come into force at 12:00 of October 12, 2017. The agreement provided for a ceasefire in the area, and ensured that the area residents would not be displaced, in addition to the passage of humanitarian aids to the area.

The Kazakhstani Minister of Foreign Affairs read the final statement of the guarantor states (Russia, Turkey, Iran) at the conclusion of the final session of Astana talks' round 7 that were held on 30th and 31st of October 2017. The guarantor states called on the parties to the conflict in Syria to take steps towards building trust, including releasing detainees and forcibly-disappeared persons, delivering dead bodies, and ensure the passage of humanitarian aids into besieged areas.

94% of all documented attacks on vital civilian facilities in October were by the Syrian-Russian alliance forces who topped all parties for the second month in a row in this respect -even though attacks by Russian forces have dropped by half compared to last September. Deir Ez-Zour governorate saw most of the Syrian-Russian alliance's attacks with a percentage of 46% of all attacks.



## 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 researchers who are scattered across Syrian governorates with the cooperation and coordination of the local residents and activists. 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.

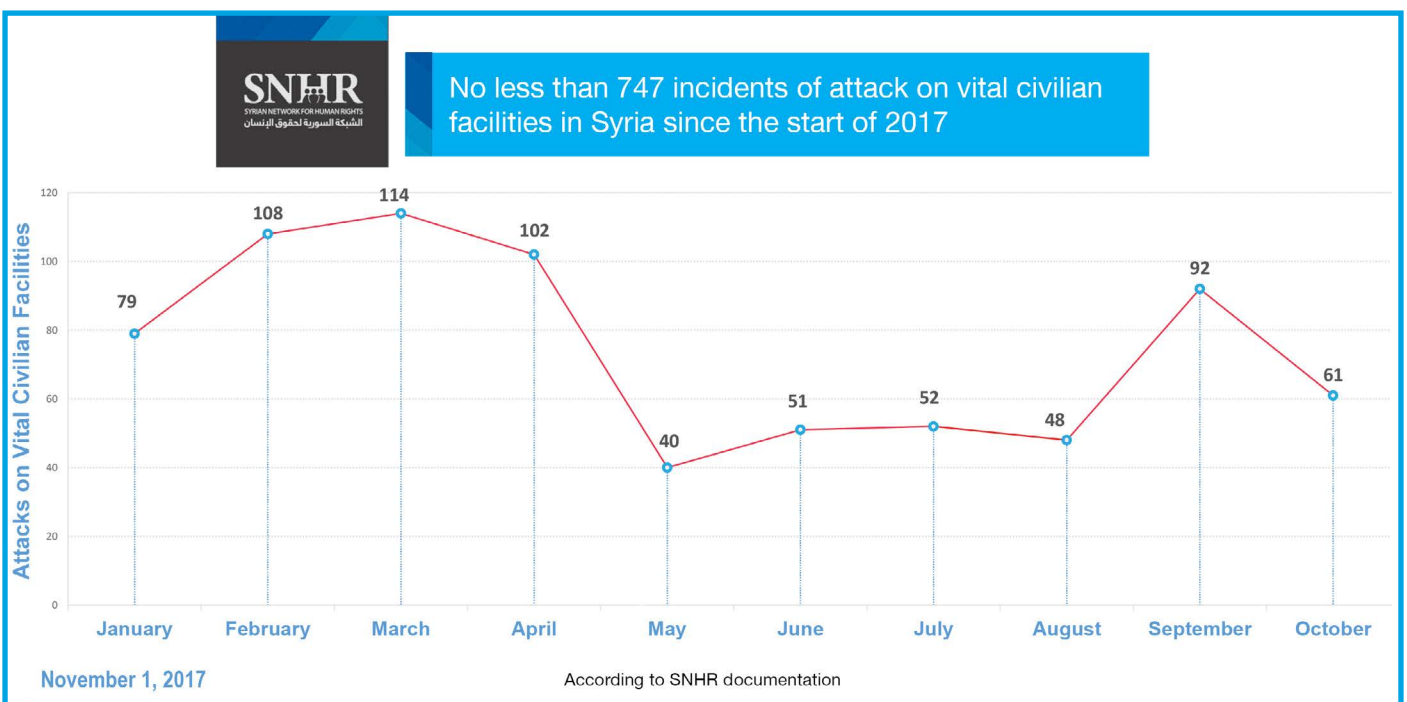
The type and number of evidences vary from one case to another. In light of the challenges we mentioned above, many of the incidents' legal description change based on new evidences or clues that surface after we had released the report. We add these evidences and clues to our data archive. On the other 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

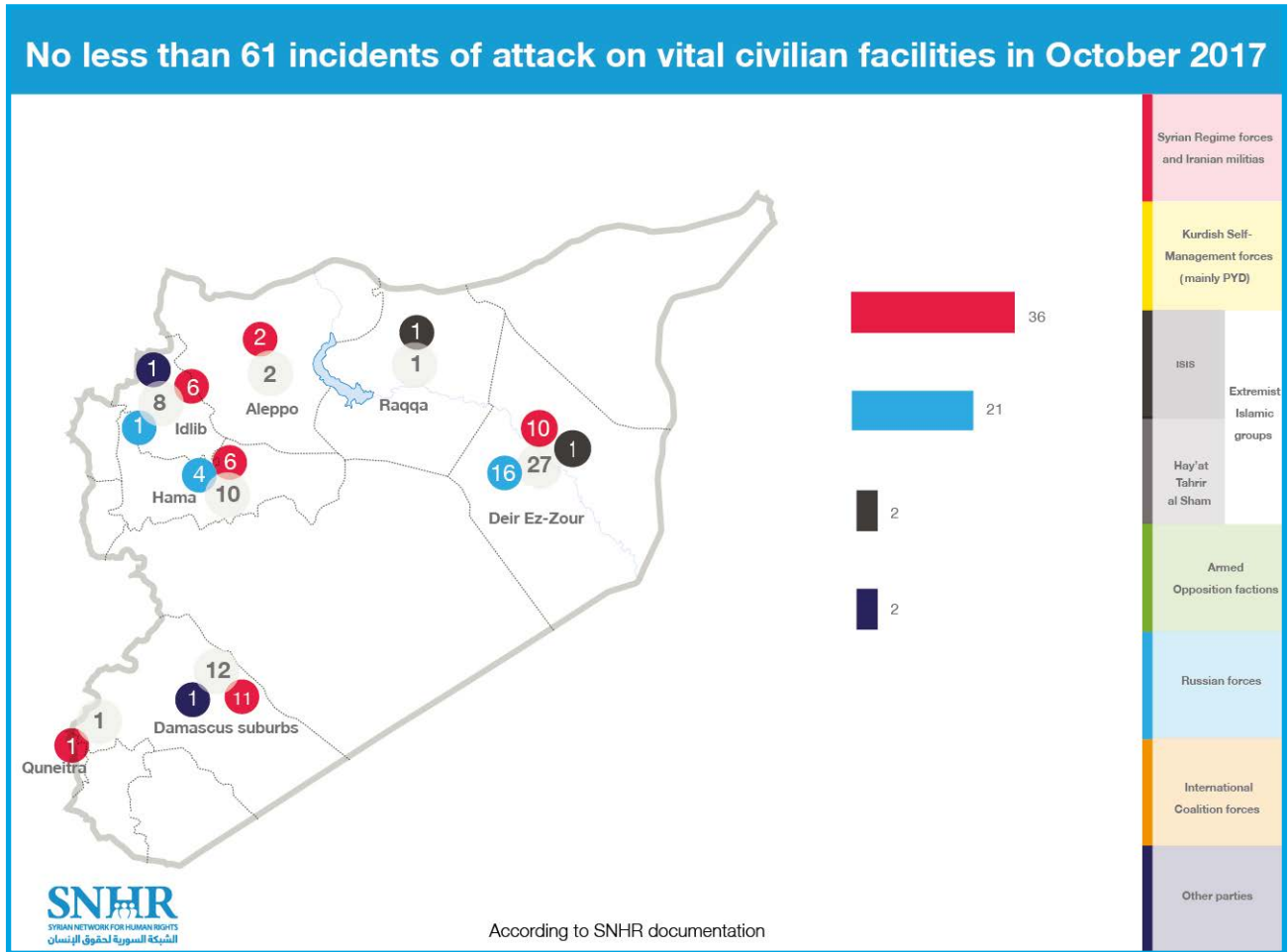
### A. Toll of incidents of attack on vital civilian facilities since the start of 2017

SNHR has documented 747 incidents of attack on vital civilian facilities between the start of 2017 and November of the same year



## B. Toll of Attacks on Vital Civilian Facilities in October

Through daily documentation and monitoring at SNHR, we recorded no less than 61 incidents of attack on vital civilian facilities in October 2017



Distributed as follows:

- A. Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, Shiite foreign militias): 36
- B. Russian forces: 21
- C. Extremist Islamic groups
  - ISIS (self-proclaimed the Islamic State): 2
- D. Other parties: 2

Most notable facilities that were targeted in October 2017

19 infrastructures, 13 vital educational facilities, 19 places of worship, four communal facilities, three vital medical facilities, three refugee camps.



## Distribution of Targeted Vital Civilian Facilities by the Parties to the Conflict in October 2017

Other Parties	ISIS	Russian Forces	Syrian Regime Forces	Perpetrating Party
				Targeted Facility
				Places of Worship
		6	13	Mosques
				Vital Educational Facilities
	2	2	7	Schools
1			1	Kindergartens
				Vital Medical Facilities
		1	2	Medical Facilities
				Communal Facilities
		1	3	Markets
				Infrastructures
		1		Power Stations
		1		Water Systems
			3	Civil Defense Facilities
1		1	2	Official Headquarters
		7	2	Transportation Systems
			1	Bakeries
				Refugee Camps
		1	2	Refugee Camps
2	2	21	36	Total





### III. Details of Most Notable Incidents in October

The report sheds light on most notable incidents of attack against vital civilian facilities 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: "[Four Medical Personnel Killed, and Six Incidents of Attack on Vital Medical and Civil Defense Facilities in October 2017 - Syrian Regime Forces Top all other Parties in Terms of Violations against Medical Personnel](#)"

#### **A. Syrian regime forces (Army, security, local militias, Shiite foreign militias)**

##### **Places of worship**

###### - Mosques

Wednesday, October 4, 2017, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at al Eman Mosque in al Sabha village, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governo-rate. The mosque building was moderately damaged. The village was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Thursday, October 12, 2017, Syrian regime forces artillery fired a number of mortar shells at [Abu Bakr al Siddeeq Mosque](#) in al Sharqi neighborhood in [Anadan](#) city, northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. The shelling created a hole in the mosque roof and [heavily damaged](#) its furniture. 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 Abu Bakr al Siddeeq Mosque in Anadan city, Aleppo – October 12, 2017



Sunday, October 15, 2017, around 22:00, Syrian regime forces artillery fired a number of shells at [Omar ben al Khattab Mosque](#) -known as the Grand Mosque- in Harbnafseh village, southern suburbs of Hama governorate. The mosque building was partially destroyed, and its furniture was heavily damaged. The town was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

Friday, October 27, 2017, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at al Salam Mosque -known as al Hamzat Mosque- in Ghreiba village, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The mosque building was partially destroyed and was rendered out of commission. The village was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.



Destruction in the aftermath of a bombing by Syrian regime forces on al Salam Mosque in Ghreiba village, Deir Ez-Zour – October 27, 2017



## **Vital educational facilities**

### - Schools

Friday, October 6, 2017, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at al Hlubbaa Elementary School in southern al Hlubbaa village, southern suburbs of Idlib governorate. The school fence was partially destroyed. The village was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

Tuesday, October 31, 2017, Syrian regime forces artillery fired a number of shells in front of Mohammad Naser Ash'oush Elementary School in [Jisreen](#) town, Eastern Ghouta, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate, which resulted in a massacre. In addition, the school building, its fence, and cladding materials were moderately damaged. It should be noted that about 400 students are enrolled in that school. The town was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

### - Kindergartens

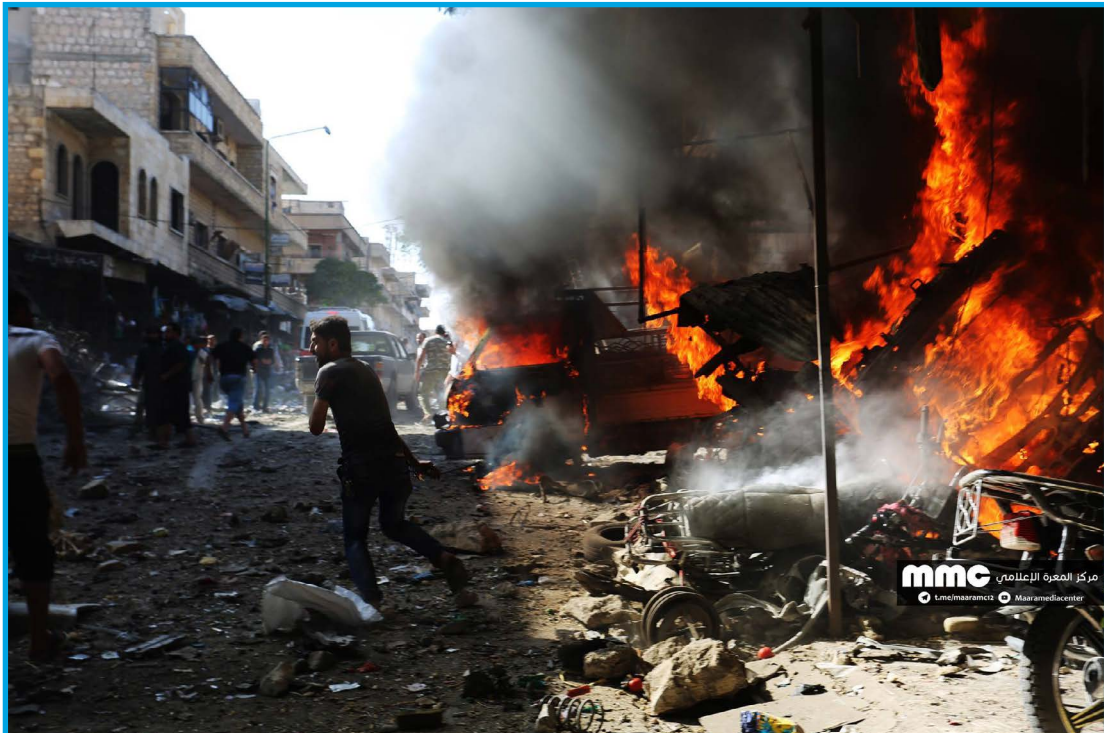
Wednesday, October 29, 2017, around 11:00, Syrian regime forces artillery fired a number of shells near Naqabat al Mu'lemeen Kindergarten for Children in [Kafr Batna](#) town, Eastern Ghouta, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate. The kindergarten building and its fence were moderately damaged, as the kindergarten was temporarily rendered out of commission. The town was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

## **Communal facilities**

### - Markets

Sunday, October 8, 2017, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes bombed the west side of the [main market's](#) entrance in the middle of [Ma'aret al Nu'man](#) city, southern suburbs of [Idlib governorate](#), which resulted in a massacre. In addition, a number of shops were burned, while others were [heavily destroyed](#) and the market facilities were [heavily damaged](#). The city was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.





Destruction and fires in the aftermath of a bombing by Syrian regime forces on the main market in Ma'aret al Nu'man city, Idlib – October 8, 2017

## Infrastructures

### - Official headquarters

Sunday, October 8, 2017, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired a number of missiles near the cultural center in the middle of Ma'aret al Nu'man city, southern suburbs of [Idlib governorate](#), which resulted in a massacre. In addition, the center building was moderately damaged. The city was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

### - Transportation systems

Thursday, October 5, 2017, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at the water-crossing that connects [al Baghouz](#) village and al Boukamal city in al Baghouz village, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, which resulted in a massacre. Additionally, a number of boats and ferries were burned. The village was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.



### - Bakeries

Saturday, October 7, 2017, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at al Jamil Bakery for Bread in the middle of al Ashara city, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The bakery building was moderately damaged. The city was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

### **Refugee camps**

Wednesday, October 18, 2017, Syrian regime forces artillery fired a number of shells at al Shahar Camp near Jabata al Khashab village, northern suburbs of Qunetira. The tents were moderately damaged. The area was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

### **Russian forces**

#### **Places of worship**

##### - Mosques

Saturday, October 7, 2017, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a number of missiles at Othman ben Affan Mosque in [Buqrus Tahtani](#) village, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The mosque building was [heavily destroyed](#), as the mosque was rendered out of commission. The town was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Sunday, October 22, 2017, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a number of missiles at “[Arafa](#) village” mosque – the village follows al Hamra county in eastern suburbs of [Hama governorate](#). The mosque building was [partially destroyed](#) and its furniture was [moderately damaged](#). The village 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 mosque of Arafa village – October 22, 2017

Tuesday, October 31, 2017, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a number of missiles at [Omar ben al Khattab Mosque](#) in al Efan neighborhood in al Ashara city, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The mosque building was destroyed almost completely, as the mosque was rendered out of commission. The city was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

### **Vital educational facilities**

#### - Schools

Sunday, October 15, 2017, around 01:20, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a number of missiles at Tehtaya School for [Elementary Education](#) in al Shamali neighborhood in Tehtaya village, southern suburbs of Idlib governorate. The school building, as well as its fence, was [partially destroyed](#) and its furniture was heavily damaged, as the school was rendered out of commission. It should be noted that one of the schoolrooms was a home for an IDP family. 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 the elementary school in Tehtaya village, Idlib – October 15, 2017

## **Communal facilities**

### - Markets

Friday, October 27, 2017, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a number of missiles at “[al Bseira](#) city” market in eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. A number of shops were heavily damaged. The city was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

## **Infrastructures**

### - Water systems

Sunday, October 22, 2017, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a number of missiles at the high water tank in Arafa village, which is a part of al Hamra county, in eastern suburbs of Hama governorate. [The tank](#) was [completely destroyed](#) and was rendered out of commission. It is worth noting that the tank supplies water for nearly 2,000 people. The village 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 high water tank in Arafa village, Hama – October 22, 2017

#### - Transportation systems

Wednesday, October 4, 2017, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a number of missiles at the water-crossing between [al Qouriya](#) city and [al Shnan village](#) in al Qouriya city, eastern suburbs of [Deir Ez-Zour](#) governorate, which resulted in a massacre. Additionally, [a number of boats](#) and ferries in the crossing [were burned](#) and rendered out of commission. The city was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Wednesday, October 11, 2017, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a number of missiles at the water-crossing between al Abbas village and Hjein city in al Abbas village, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. A number of ferries were destroyed and burned. The village was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Saturday, October 28, 2017, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a number of missiles at al Baath Bridge -known as al A'your Bridge- that connects al Hweyqa neighborhood in north of Deir Ez-Zour city with the rest of the city's neighborhoods. The Bridge was destroyed from the middle and was rendered out of commission. The city was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.





## **C. Extremist Islamic groups**

### **- ISIS (self-proclaimed the Islamic State)**

#### **Vital educational facilities**

##### - Schools

Friday morning, October 27, 2017, a landmine planted by ISIS inside a school in Ratla village, eastern suburbs of Raqqa, before retreating from the village exploded, which resulted in casualties. In addition, a classroom was [moderately damaged](#). The village was under the control of the Kurdish-majority Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) at the time of the incident.

## **D. Other parties**

#### **Vital educational facilities**

##### - Kindergartens

Monday, October 16, 2017, an explosion occurred inside Bara'em al Amal Kindergarten, east of [Kansafra](#) village, southern suburbs of Idlib governorate. The kindergarten building was heavily damaged and its furniture burned, as the kindergarten was rendered out of commission. As of this writing, we haven't been able to determine the nature of the explosion and the group behind it. The village was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham 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, 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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