

# A High Human and Material Cost to Rid a Part of al Boukamal Area of ISIS

411 Civilians Killed,  
including 124 Children and  
Nearly 200,000 Displaced

**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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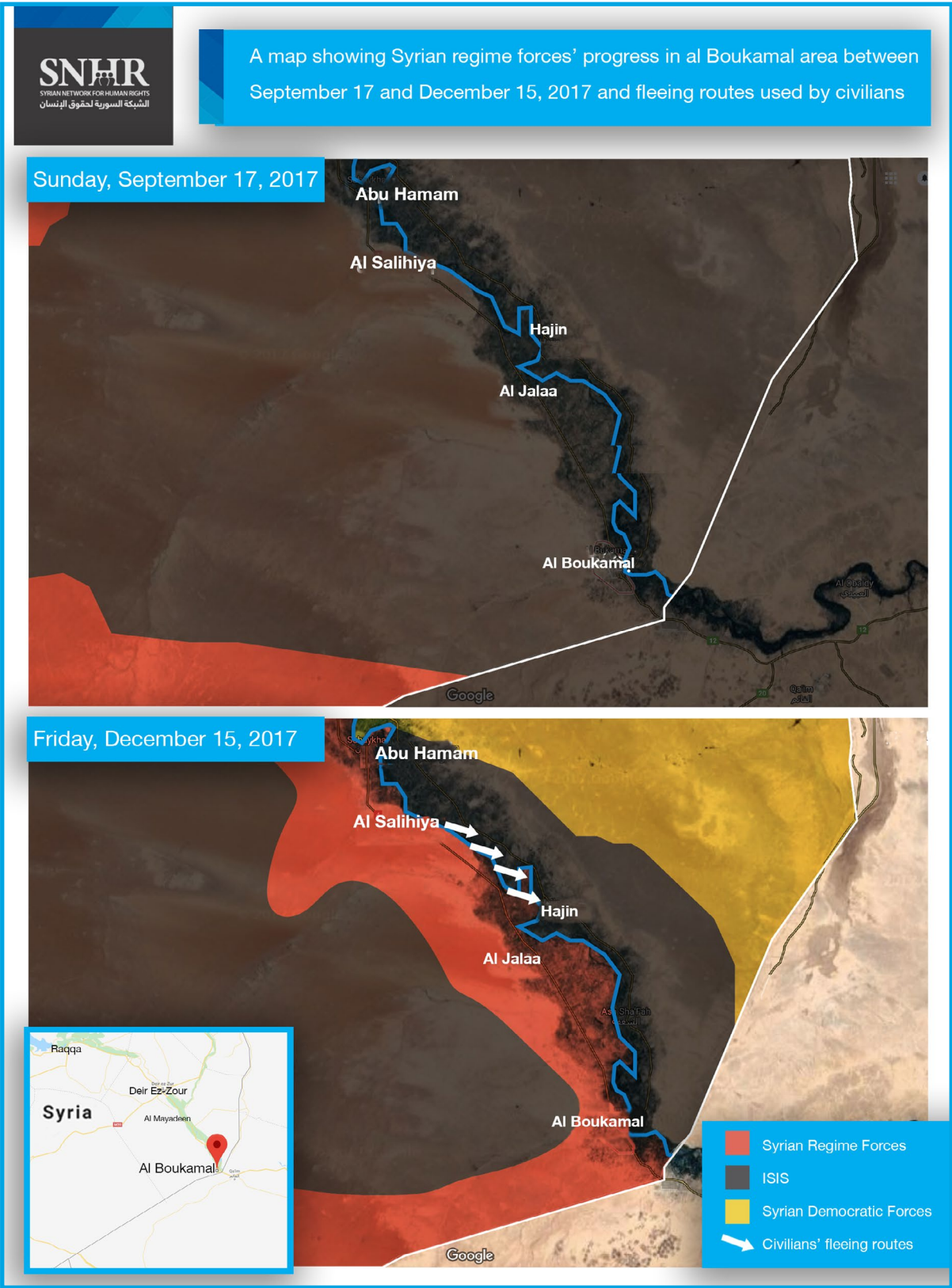
## I. Introduction and Historical Context

Al Boukamal area is located in eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The area contains 15 villages and towns (al Salihiya, al Jala, al Sukkariya....). Al Boukamal is 110 km to the east of Deir Ez-Zour city and only 8 km away from the Iraqi-Syrian borders. In late-June 2014, ISIS managed to seize complete control of al Boukamal area after weeks-long battles with factions from the armed opposition. Prior to the last attack in September 2017, the area's population was about 300,000 people including IDPs from al Mayadeen and Deir Ez-Zour.

On Sunday, September 17, 2017, Syrian regime forces started a battle to take over the villages on the Syrian-Iraqi borders towards al Boukamal area in eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour. The offensive was in coordination with the Iraqi government under a Russian air cover while [Iranian militias](#), [Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces \(PMF\)](#), and [the Lebanese group Hezbollah](#) were openly and heavily involved in the battles. These battles were also an extension of the offensive launched by the Syrian-Russian alliance on Deir Ez-Zour governorate in mid-August 2017 that focused in particular on the suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour to the west of Euphrates River.



This offensive saw serious violations of the international humanitarian law as we documented hundreds of repeated violations on a daily basis, in addition to the deliberate targeting of vital civilian facilities – especially water crossing which civilians use to flee to safer areas. All of this forced 200,000 civilians – about 66% of the population as most of them fled to the villages on the opposing bank of Euphrates River.



The Syrian regime's takeover of these areas might lead to retaliatory acts against the residents who couldn't flee under the pretext of being affiliates of ISIS or having assisted the group. We have pointed out in a [past report](#) that the lives of civilians who had to stay in areas taken over by Syrian regime forces in Hawiet Qatea' area in Deir Ez-Zour city might be at risk in light of the violations and oppression by the Syrian regime, similar to what the Syrian regime's done in 2012 when the regime raided the areas that were no longer under its control and followed the raid with barbarian retaliatory acts.

## **Methodology**

The report draws primarily upon the daily, ongoing documentation and monitoring by SNHR. Secondly, we relied on accounts by survivors, eyewitnesses, and local activists that we've talked to via phone or social media. We have also analyzed a large number of videos and pictures that were posted online or sent to us by local activists via e-mail, Skype, or social media.

## **II. Executive Summary**

The report covers the period of time from September 17, 2017 to December 15, 2017 and sheds light on the most notable violations by the Syrian-Russian alliance in al Boukamal area.

### **A. Massacres and other acts of unlawful killing**

We recorded the killing of 411 civilians, including 124 children and 83 women (adult female). Additionally, no less than 23 massacres were recorded as follows:

Syrian regime forces and pro-regime militias: 168 civilians, including 48 children and 34 women. Additionally, no less than eight massacres were recorded.

Russian forces: 243 civilians, including 76 children and 49 women. Additionally, no less than 15 massacres were recorded.

### **B. Targeting vital civilian facilities**

We recorded no less than 20 attacks on vital civilian facilities as follows:

Syrian regime forces and pro-regime militias: 14

Russian forces: 6



### III.Details

#### **A. Syrian regime forces**

##### **1- Massacres and other acts of unlawful killing**

We recorded the killing of 168 civilians, including 48 children and 34 women, at the hands of Syrian regime forces and pro-regime militias between September 17, 2017 and December 15, 2017. Additionally, no less than eight massacres were recorded in that period of time.

Thursday, October 5, 2017, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at the water crossing between [al Baghouz](#) village and al Boukamal city in al Baghouz village, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, which resulted in the killing of seven civilians at once. The village was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Tuesday, October 17, 2017, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at al Ghabra village which is administratively a part of al Boukamal area, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The bombardment resulted in the killing of five civilians, including one child and three women. The village was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Monday, November 6, 2017, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at al Hari village which is administratively a part of al Boukamal area, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The bombardment resulted in the killing of nine civilians, including two children and one woman. The village was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Saturday, November 11, 2017, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at the water crossing in al Ghabra village which is administratively a part of al Boukamal area, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The bombardment resulted in the killing of seven civilians at once. The village was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Tuesday, November 28, 2017, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at the water crossing in al Ramadi village, known as [al Baq'an](#) village, which is administratively a part of al Boukamal area, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The bombardment resulted in the killing of 11 civilians. The village was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.





## 2- Targeting vital civilian facilities

We recorded no less than 14 attacks on vital civilian facilities between September 17, 2017 and December 15, 2017

### Places of worship

#### - Mosques

Tuesday, October 17, 2017, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at al Freih Mosque in [al Jalaa](#) town, which is administratively a part of al Boukamal city, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The mosque building was moderately damaged. The town was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Friday, November 3, 2017, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at [al Nab'iya Mosque](#) in al Safsafa neighborhood, al Salihiya village which is a part of al Boukamal city, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The mosque building and its cladding materials were moderately damaged. The town was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.



Damages in al Nab'iya Mosque in the aftermath of an air attack by Syrian regime warplanes, al Salihiya village, Deir Ez-Zour – November 3, 2017



## **Infrastructures**

### - Power stations and energy sources

Monday, November 6, 2017, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at al Shihan Gas Station that sells fuels in al Jalaa town which is administratively a part of al Boukamal city, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The station building and its equipment were moderately damaged. The city was under the control of ISIS 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 between 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 ferries and boats were burned. The village was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Monday, November 6, 2017, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at the water crossing in al Ramadi village which is administratively a part of al Boukamal city, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. A number of ferries and boats were heavily destroyed. It should be noted that the crossing connects al Ramadi village with a number of villages that are part of al Boukamal city. The village was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Saturday, November 11, 2017, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at the water crossing that connects al Sousa town and al Sukkariya village in al Sousa town 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 heavily destroyed. The town was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Tuesday, November 28, 2017, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at the water crossing in al Ramadi village, known as al Baq'an 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 heavily destroyed. It should be noted that the crossing connects al Ramadi village with a number of villages that are part of al Boukamal city. The village was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.



## **B. Russian forces**

### **1- Massacres and other acts of unlawful killing**

We recorded the killing of 243 civilians, including 76 children and 49 women, at the hands of Russian forces between September 17, 2017 and December 15, 2017. Additionally, no less than 15 massacres were recorded.

Saturday, September 30, 2017, around 04:30, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a number of missiles at al Boukamal city, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, which resulted in the killing of 13 civilians, including five children and five women. The city was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Sunday, October 1, 2017, around 01:00, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a number of missiles at [al Boukamal](#) city, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, which resulted in the killing of 11 civilians, including two female children and three women. Additionally, about 10 others were wounded. 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 al Boukamal city, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, which resulted in the killing of 13 civilians from the same family, including seven children and five women. The city was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Tuesday, November 14, 2017, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a number of missiles at a gathering of IDPs tents in al lwayna area, Badiya of M'izila village which is administratively a part of al Boukamal area, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The bombardment resulted in the killing of 11 civilians (10 children and one woman) who were mostly from the same family. The village was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Thursday, November 23, 2017, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a number of missiles at the water crossing that connects Hasrat village and al Sha'fa city in Hasrat village which is administratively a part of al Boukamal area, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The bombardment resulted in the killing of 13 civilians, including two female children and two women. The village was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.





Friday, November 24, 2017, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired a number of missiles in front of a gathering of IDPs tents in the badiya between al Sayyal village and al Ghabra village which are both administratively part of al Boukamal city, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The bombardment resulted in the killing of 29 civilians, including 12 children and seven women. The area was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Sunday, November 26, 2017, around 01:30, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a number of missiles at a residential building in [al Sha'fa](#) city which is administratively a part of al Boukamal area, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The bombardment resulted in the killing of 44 civilians, including 20 children and nine women, who were mostly from the same family. The village was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

## 2- Targeting vital civilian facilities

We recorded no less than six attacks on vital civilian facilities between September 17, 2017 and December 15, 2017

### Places of worship

#### - Mosques

Friday, November 17, 2017, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a number of missiles at al Tawhid Mosque, known as al Haj Aboud al Salem al Hamoudi Mosque, in al Ghbara village which is administratively a part of al Boukamal city, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The mosque was destroyed completely and rendered out of commission. The village was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.



Destruction in al Tawhid Mosque in the aftermath of an air attack we believe was Russian on al Ghbara village, Deir Ez-Zour – November 17, 2017



## Infrastructures

### - Transportation systems

Thursday, October 19, 2017, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a number of missiles at the water crossing between al Boukamal city and al Baghouz village, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, which resulted in a massacre. Additionally, a number of ferries and boats at the bank of the crossing were burned. The city was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Thursday, November 23, 2017, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a number of missiles at the water crossing between Hasrat village and al Sha'fa city in Hasrat 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 heavily destroyed. The village was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Friday, November 24, 2017, fixed-wing warplanes we believe were Russian fired a number of missiles at the water crossing between al Abbas village and Hajin city in al Abbas village which is administratively a part of al Boukamal area, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour city. The bombardment resulted in casualties. Additionally, a number of ferries and boats were heavily destroyed. The village was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

## IV. Conclusions and Recommendations

1- The Syrian-Russian alliance has, beyond any doubt, violated Security Council Resolutions 2139 and 2254 which both state that indiscriminate attacks must be halted. Also, The Syrian and Russian regime have violated Article 8 of Rome Statute through the act of willful killing which constitutes war crimes.

2- We can confirm that the bombardment mentioned in this report has targeted defenseless civilians. Therefore, Syrian and Russian forces have violated the rules of the international human rights law which guarantee the right to life. Additionally, these violations were perpetrated in a non-international armed conflict which amount to a war crime where all elements were fulfilled.

3- The attacks mentioned in this report, which were carried out by The Syrian and Russian regimes, are considered a violation of the customary international law as the shells were fired at a populated area rather than a specific military object.

4- Aerial bombardment has caused collateral damages that involved loss of lives, injuries, and significant damages to civil facilities. There are strong indicators suggesting that the damage was too excessive compared to the anticipated military benefit.



## **Recommendations**

### **Russian regime**

- Launch investigations regarding the incidents included in this report, make the findings of these investigations public for the Syrian people, and hold the people involved accountable.
- Compensate all the damaged centers and facilities, rebuild and rehabilitate them, and compensate all the victims' families and the wounded who were killed by the current Russian regime.
- Completely cease the bombing of hospitals, protected objects, and civilian areas, and respect the customary international law.
- Apply pressure on the Syrian regime and its pro-regime militias to protect the civilians in the areas that were recently taken over by the Syrian regime, and ensure that residents are not subjected to acts of oppression that manifest in extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, and inhumane treatment.

### **Security Council**

- The Security Council has to take additional steps after Resolution 2254 was adopted, which explicitly states: "Demands that all parties immediately cease any attacks against civilians and civilian objects as such, including attacks against medical facilities and personnel, and any indiscriminate use of weapons, including through shelling and aerial bombardment."
- The Syrian case should be referred to the International Criminal Court and all those who are responsible must be held accountable including the Russian regime whose involvement in war crimes has been proven.
- Instill security and peace in Syria and implement the norm of the Responsibility to Protect in order to protect the lives, culture, and history of the Syrian people from being destroyed, looted, and ruined.
- Expand the sanctions to include the Syrian, Russian, and Iranian regimes who are directly involved in committing crimes against humanity and war crimes against the Syrian people.

### **OHCHR**

The OHCHR should submit a report to the Human Rights Council and other organs of the United Nations on incidents mentioned in this report as they perpetrated by forces we believe were Russian in coordination with government forces.



## United Nations special envoy to Syria

- Expand Security Council briefings rather than only limiting them to the violations of al Nusra Front and ISIS
- Condemn the perpetrators of crimes, the massacres, and those who were primarily responsible for shattering the de-escalation agreements.

## International community

- In light of the split of the Security Council and its utter inability, Steps must be taken on the national and regional levels to form alliances to support the Syrian people that would protect them from the daily killing and siege and enhance the support for the relief efforts. Additionally, the principle of universal jurisdiction must be activated in local courts regarding these crimes in order to conduct fair trials for all those who were involved.
- SNHR has repeatedly called for the implementation of the “Responsibility to Protect” norm in tens of studies and reports and as a member of the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICRtoP) after all political channels through the Arab League’s agreement and then Mr. Kofi Annan’s plan have been drought out in addition to the Cessation of Hostilities statements and de-escalation agreements. Therefore, steps under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations should be taken, and the norm of the “Responsibility to Protect”, which was established by the United Nations General Assembly, should be implemented. The Security Council is still hindering the protection of civilians in Syria.
- Renew the pressure on the Security Council to refer the case in Syria to the International Criminal Court
- Work on fulfilling justice and achieving accountability in Syria through the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Council and work on activating the principle of the universal jurisdiction.

## Acknowledgment and Condolences

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