

No less than 92 Incidents of Attack on Vital Civilian Facilities in September 2017

The Russian Guarantor is Shattering Astana Agreement with 50 Attacks on Vital Civilian Facilities

SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

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The Syrian Network for Human Rights, founded in June 2011, is a non-governmental, non-profit independent organization that is a primary source for the United Nations on all death toll-related statistics 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 April 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 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 sponsoring parties- won't see are still going on as nothing had happened.

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.



In September, we recorded that Syrian-Russian alliance is again majorly responsible for attacks on vital facilities, as their attacks involved the areas that were included in the de-escalation agreements, in addition to the eastern region -particularly Deir Ez-Zour governorate. Russian forces were responsible for most attacks on vital civilian facilities out of all the parties to the conflict after a four-month drop, where Russian forces were responsible for 55% of all attacks in September, while Syrian regime forces followed with 28% 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.

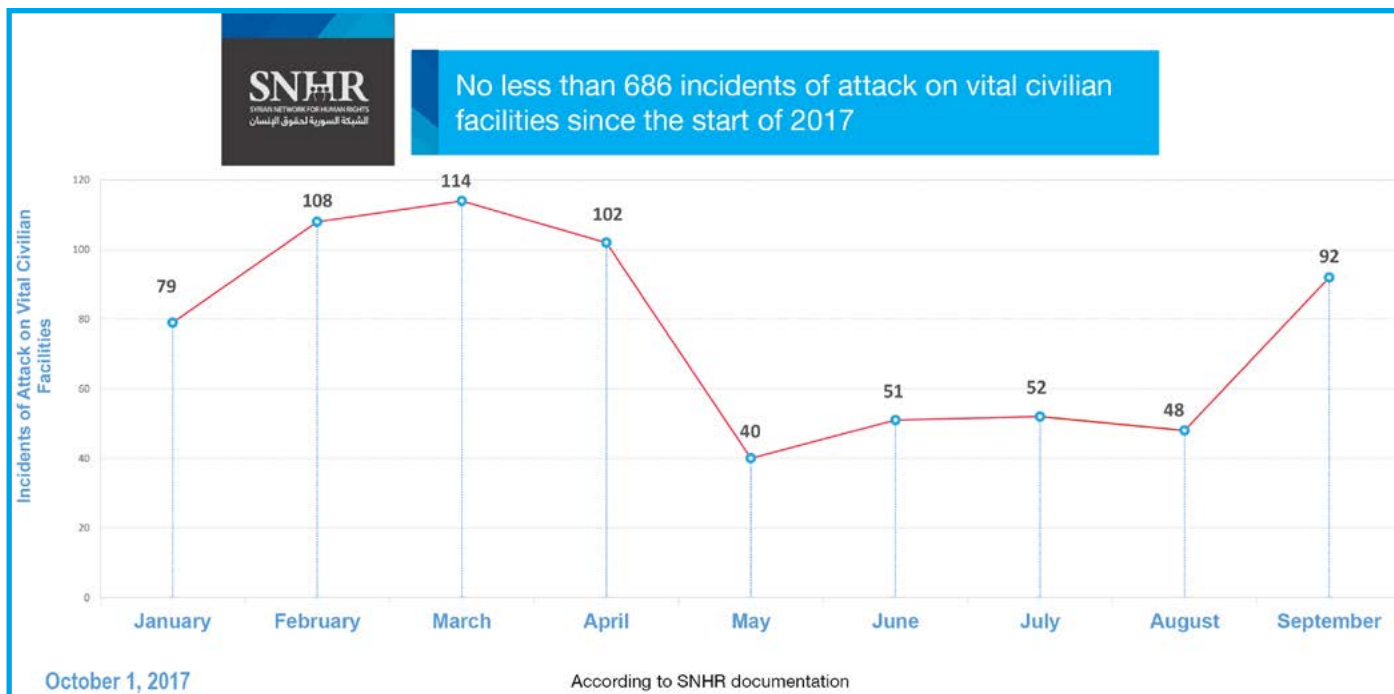
You can read the methodology adopted by SNHR in [classifying vital civilian facilities](#) on this URL



II. Executive Summary

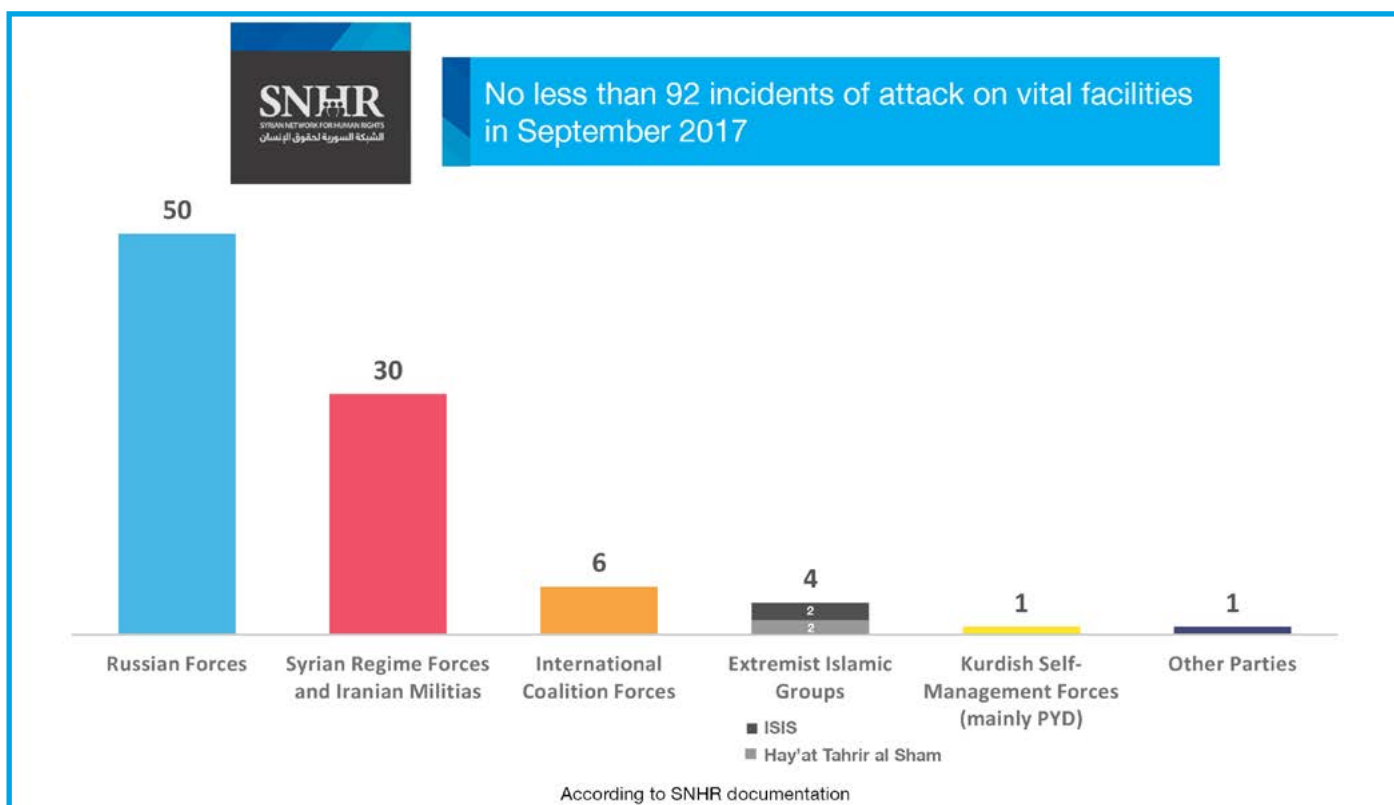
A. Toll of incidents of attack on vital civilian facilities since the start of 2017

SNHR has documented 686 incidents of attack on vital civilian facilities between the start of 2017 and October of the same year



B. Toll of Incidents of Attack on Vital Civilian Facilities in September

Through daily documentation and monitoring at SNHR, we recorded no less than 92 incidents of attack on vital civilian facilities in September 2017



Distributed as follows:

- A. Syrian regime forces (army, security, local militias, Shiite foreign militias): 30
- B. Russian forces: 50
- C. Extremist Islamic groups
 - ISIS (self-proclaimed the Islamic State): 2
 - Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (an alliance composed of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham and a number of armed opposition factions): 2
- D. Self-Management forces (primarily consisting of the Democratic Union Party – a branch for the Kurdistan Workers' Party): 1
- E. International coalition forces: 6
- F. Other parties: 1

Most notable facilities that were targeted in September 2017

31 infrastructures, 14 vital educational facilities, 13 places of worship, six communal facilities, 25 vital medical facilities, three refugee camps.

Distribution of Attacked Vital Civilian Facilities by the Perpetrator Party in September 2017							
Attacked Facility	Syrian Regime Forces	Russian Forces	Extremist Islamic Groups		-Kurdish Self Management Forces	International Coalition Forces	Other Parties
			ISIS	Hay'at Tahrir al Sham			
Places of Worship							
Mosques	2	5			1	5	
Vital Educational Facilities							
Schools	3	8	1				
Universities				2			
Vital Medical Facilities							
Medical Facilities	5	11					
Ambulances	5	4					
Communal Facilities							
Markets	4	1				1	
Infrastructures							
Power Stations		2					
Civil Defense Facilities	6	12					
Official Service Headquarters	1	2	1				1
Transportation Systems	2	2					
Industrial Facilities		2					
Refugee Camps							
Refugee Camps	2	1					
Total	30	50	2	2	1	6	1



III. Details of September's Incidents

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: [“Nine Medical and Civil Defense Personnel Killed, and 43 Incidents of Attack on their Vital Facilities in September 2017 - Syrian Regime Forces Top all other Parties in Terms of Killing Medical Personnel”](#)

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

Places of worship

- Mosques

Thursday, September 28, 2017, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes (Su-24) fired a number of missiles at al Janoubi Mosque in Mazra'at al Tes'a area, Sahl al Rouj area, western suburbs of Idlib governorate. The mosque building was partially destroyed, and its furniture was moderately damaged. The area was under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.



Destruction at al Janoubi Mosque in the aftermath of a Syrian regime bombing in Mazra'at al Tes'a, Idlib – September 28, 2017



Vital educational facilities

- Schools

Saturday, September 30, 2017, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired a number of missiles near Bedan School in [Graniij](#) city, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The school fence was partially destroyed, and its building was slightly damaged. The city was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.



Damages in the aftermath of a Syrian regime bombing on Bedan School in Graniij city, Deir Ez-Zour – September 30, 2017

Communal facilities

- Markets

Monday, September 4, 2017, around 15:00, Syrian regime forces artillery fired four [mortar shells](#) at the local market in the middle of [Ein Tarma](#) town, Eastern Ghouta, eastern Damascus suburbs governorate, which resulted in casualties. Additionally, [a number of shops](#) were [heavily damaged](#). The town was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.



Damages at the local market in Ein Tarma town in the aftermath of a Syrian regime bombing, Damascus suburbs - September 4, 2017



Wednesday, September 20, 2017, fixed-wing warplanes of the Syrian-Russian alliance fired a [number of missiles](#) at the [main market](#) in the middle of [Qal'at al Madiq](#) town, western suburbs of [Hama governorate](#), which resulted in [a massacre](#). Additionally, a number of shops and market facilities were damaged, while a number of residential buildings were heavily destroyed. The town was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.



Destruction in the aftermath of a bombing by the Syrian-Russian alliance on Qal'at al Madiq town, Hama – September 20, 2017

Infrastructures

- Transportation systems

Saturday, September 16, 2017, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at al Boulayl – Jdeed Ekidat river crossing, [al Boulayl](#) village, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, which resulted in a massacre. Additionally, the ferries, as well as the crossing facilities, were heavily damaged. The village was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Refugee camps

Tuesday, September 19, 2017, around 11:20, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired a number of parachuted missiles near an IDPs shelter in western al [Habeit](#) village, southern suburbs of Idlib governorate. The shelter fence was partially destroyed, and the building was moderately damaged. It should be noted that the shelter is a former school, al Yarmouk School. The village was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.



Media activist Mohammad al Ali spoke to SNHR, via WhatsApp, about the incident:

“Tuesday morning, al Hbeit town was targeted by Syrian warplanes that were visible to the naked eye. The warplanes carried out a number of airstrikes – the first of which was with one missile. A few minutes later, another airstrike was carried out with two missiles that destroyed three houses in al Gharbiya area. At noon, Russian warplanes flew above the village according to observatories, and carried out an airstrike without closing in that targeted al Yarmouk School in al Gharbiya area. The school houses IDPs from Hama suburbs. The airstrike caused damages in the area. I immediately headed there to cover the bombing, and found civil defense teams aiding the wounded. As civil defense teams were there, the warplanes returned and bombed the area again, to injure five civil defense members.”

Russian forces

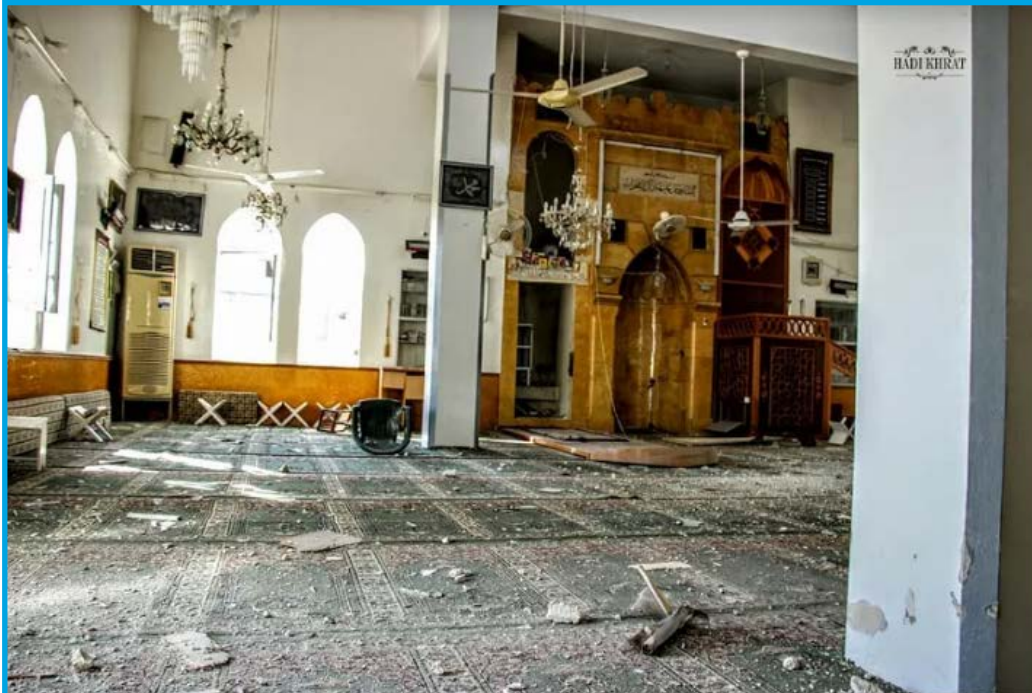
Places of worship

- Mosques

Wednesday, September 20, 2017, fixed-wing warplanes we believe are Russian fired one missile near Abu Baker [al Siddeeq Mosque](#) in al Sahrqi neighborhood, [Jarjanaz](#) town, eastern suburbs of [Idlib governorate](#), which resulted in [casualties](#). Additionally, [the mosque building was partially destroyed](#), and its furniture was [heavily damaged](#). The town is under the control of armed opposition factions with a minor presence for Hay'at Tahrir al Sham.

Wednesday, September 27, 2017, fixed-wing warplanes we believe are Russian fired a [number of missiles](#) near [al Eman Mosque](#) in al Gharbi neighborhood, [Jisr al Shoghhour](#) city, western suburbs of Idlib governorate. The mosque building and its furniture were moderately damaged. The city was under the joint control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham and The Islamic Turkistani Party at the time of the incident.





Damages at al Eman Mosque in the aftermath of Russian forces bombing in Jisr al Shoghour city, Idlib – September 27, 2017

Vital educational facilities

- Schools

Tuesday, September 26, 2017, fixed-wing warplanes we believe are Russian fired a [number of missiles](#) at Mohammad Bashir [al Halli School](#) in al Shamali neighborhood, [Jisr al Shoghour](#) city, western suburbs of Idlib governorate. The school fence was partially destroyed, and its building was moderately damaged. The city was under the joint control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham and The Islamic Turkistani Party at the time of the incident.

Wednesday, September 27, 2017, around 02:00, fixed-wing warplanes we believe are Russian fired [one missile](#) at [Batbou](#) School, known as [Bara'em al Thawra School](#), in Batbou village, western suburbs of [Aleppo governorate](#). The school building and its furniture were [heavily damaged](#), as the school was [rendered out of commission](#). The village was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.





Destruction at Batbou School in the aftermath of a Russian forces bombing in Batbou village, Aleppo – September 27, 2017

Communal facilities

- Markets

Thursday, September 28, 2017, fixed-wing warplanes we believe are Russian fired a number of missiles at the [main market](#) in the middle of [Jisr al Shoghour](#) city, western suburbs of Idlib governorate. A number of shops were partially destroyed, and the market facilities were heavily damaged. The city was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and the Islamic Turkistani Party at the time of the incident.

Infrastructures

- Power stations

Thursday night, September 21, 2017, fixed-wing warplanes we believe are Russian fired a number of missiles at [Khan Sheikhoun](#) Substation in [Kafr Ein village](#), located five kilometers to the west of Khan Sheikhoun city, in western suburbs of Idlib governorate. A [fire broke](#) out inside the substation and its facilities were [heavily damaged](#), as it was [rendered out of commission](#). It should be noted that the station is the main supply line for a number of areas, cities, and towns in its vicinity, such as Khan Sheikhoun, its suburbs, Kafr Nobbol, Heish, Kafr Sajna, Mouqa, al Habeit, Ma'aret Harma in the suburbs of Idlib governorate and Kafr Zita and Kafr Nbouda in the suburbs of Hama governorate, as about 400,000 use the power generated from that substation. The village was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.





Damages at Khan Sheikhoun Substation in the aftermath of a Russian forces bombing in Kafr Ein village, Idlib – September 21, 2017

- Official service headquarters

Friday, September 29, 2017, fixed-wing warplanes we believe are Russian fired a number of missiles at a telephone exchange in al Boullayl village, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The exchange building was heavily destroyed, as the exchange was rendered out of commission and communications were severed in the village. The village was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

- Transportation systems

Saturday, September 9, 2017, fixed-wing Russian forces warplanes fired a number of missiles loaded with cluster bombs at al [Boulayl-al Sabha](#) river crossing in al Boulayl village, eastern suburbs of [Deir Ez-Zour governorate](#). The ferries in the crossing were heavily destroyed, as it was rendered out of commission. It should be noted that the same warplanes bombed the same crossing with missiles at 13:00 on the following day, which resulted in a massacre. The village was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

- Industrial facilities

Friday, September 22, 2017, fixed-wing warplanes we believe are Russian fired one missile at a salt factory on the road between [Kafr Sajna](#) village and Khan Sheikhon city in southern suburbs of Idlib governorate, which resulted in casualties. Additionally, the factory building was heavily destroyed, as the factory was rendered out of commission. The area was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.



Refugee camps

Saturday, September 23, 2017, fixed-wing [warplanes](#) we believe are Russian fired two missiles on the eastern outskirts of al Nour IDPs camp, which is resided by IDPs from Hama suburbs. The camp is located in southeastern [Jarjanaz town](#), eastern suburbs of Idlib governorate. [A number of tents](#) were moderately damaged. The town was under the control of armed opposition factions with a minor presence for Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.



Damages at al Nour Camp in the aftermath of a Russian forces bombing in Jarjanaz town, Idlib – September 23, 2017

C. Extremist Islamic groups

- ISIS (self-proclaimed the Islamic State)

Vital educational facilities

- Schools

Friday, September 8, 2017, a landmine planted by ISIS detonated inside Kebsh Gharbi Elementary School in Kebsh Gharbi village, northern suburbs of Raqqa governorate, which resulted in casualties. Additionally, a classroom wall collapsed. The village was under the control of the Kurdish-majority Syrian Democratic Forces at the time of the incident.



- Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (an alliance composed of Fateh al Sham Front and a number of armed opposition factions)

Vital educational facilities

- Universities

Wednesday, September 6, 2017, members of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham's security forces shut down Free Aleppo University in al Dana city, northern suburbs of Idlib governorate following a dispute between Free Aleppo University, which is affiliated to the interim government, and Idlib University, which is affiliated to the recently-formed Idlib Council for Higher Learning, over issuing unified admissions between the two universities. Al Dana city was under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al Sham at the time of the incident.

D. Self-Management forces (consisting primarily of the Democratic Union Party – a branch for the Kurdistan Workers' Party)

Places of worship

- Mosques

Sunday, September 10, 2017, Kurdish-majority Syrian Democratic Forces artillery fired shells at al [Basrawi Mosque](#), located near al Tawse'eya neighborhood, northwestern Raqqa city. The mosque building was partially destroyed, and its furniture was moderately damaged. The neighborhood was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

E. International coalition forces

Places of worship

- Mosques

Saturday, September 2, 2017, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at [al Noor Mosque](#), located in the north of al Noor Street (known as al Basil Street) in western Raqqa city. The mosque building was destroyed almost completely, as the mosque was rendered out of commission. The area was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

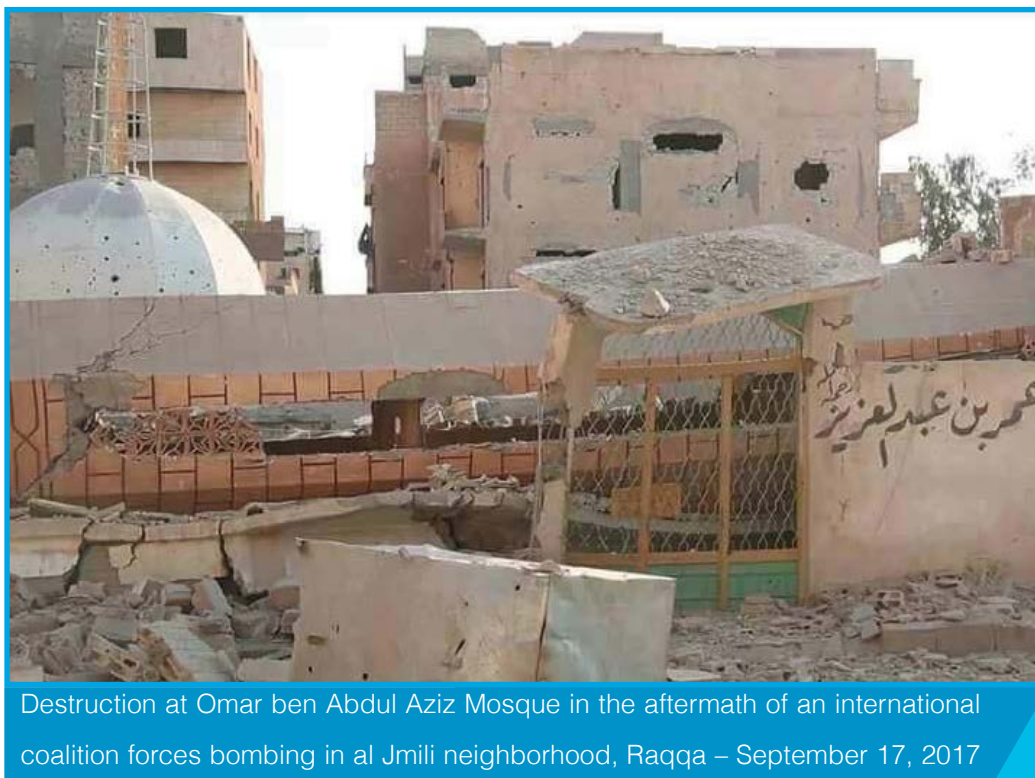




Sunday, September 10, 2017, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at Um al Mu'mineen [Aisha Mosque](#) in Rwyshed village, northern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate. The mosque building was destroyed almost completely, as the mosque was rendered out of commission. The village was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Sunday, September 17, 2017, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at [Omar ben Abdul Aziz Mosque](#), known as [al Shanti Mosque](#), in al Jmili neighborhood, western [Raqqa city](#). The mosque building was [destroyed](#) almost completely, as the mosque was rendered out of commission. The neighborhood was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.





Communal facilities

- Markets

Tuesday, September 12, 2017, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired two missiles at the market in [al Dsheisha village](#), which administratively follows Markada town, southern suburbs of [Hasaka governorate](#). A number of shops were heavily destroyed, as well as the market facilities. The village was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

F. Other parties

Infrastructures

- Official headquarters

Thursday, September 7, 2017, a rocket shell landed near the Justice Palace in [Jam'ieyat al Zahraa](#) neighborhood, western Aleppo city, with no damages recorded to the Palace building. As of this writing, we haven't been able to determine the party that was responsible for the attack. The neighborhood was under the control of Syrian regime forces 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, Self-Management forces, international coalition forces, ISIS, Hay'at Tahrir al Sham, 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 sponsoring Russian side

- 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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