

Deir Ez-Zour... A Limb-severed Governorate

29 Incidents of Attack on Bridges,
Including 15 at the Hands of the
International Coalition Forces

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 and Methodology

Deir Ez-Zour governorate is located to the northeast of Damascus the capital. It is the second-largest Syrian governorate in terms of area. Deir Ez-Zour strongly joined the popular uprising towards freedom in March 2011. By the end of 2013, wide parts of the governorate were out of the Syrian regime's control. Heated clashes between armed opposition factions and ISIS followed, and ended with ISIS taking control of Deir Ez-Zour in July 2014 except for the neighborhoods of al Joura, al Qosour, and Harabesh and the governorate's military airbase which are to this day under the control of Syrian regime forces. Euphrates River goes through Deir Ez-Zour governorate, dividing its eastern and western suburbs into two banks. Also, a branch of Euphrates River, called "al Khabour River", goes through its northern suburbs. In addition, there is a small sub-river that goes through Deir Ez-Zour city.

25 bridges were built over these rivers – 14 river bridges and 11 land bridges (referring to a construction built above valleys). These bridges are the main connection used by residents to move between the towns and the villages, and the city and the suburbs, which made these bridges a target for all the conflicting parties there, especially international coalition forces and the Syrian regime who, between them, damaged no less than 16 bridges that, as we believe, weren't used regularly to support military operations. We believe that destroying these bridges in this heavy manner goes against Protocol I – Article 56, and Protocol II – Article 15 of the international humanitarian law.



SNHR contacted a large number of eyewitnesses, survivors, and local media activists. This report includes three accounts. We have also reviewed the pictures and videos we received and verified their authenticity. These pictures show a great destruction in the bridges, and their damaged infrastructure.

We have copies of all the videos and pictures included in this report in a secret inline database and backup copies on hard drives. For more information, please see our general work [methodology](#).

We have explained the purpose of the interviews for the eyewitnesses, who gave us permission to use the information they provided in this report without offering or giving them any incentives. Also, SNHR tried to spare them agony of remembering the violation as much as possible. We also gave guarantees to conceal the identity of any eyewitnesses who preferred to use an alias.

II. Fallouts of Targeting Bridges

The bombing and destruction of bridges, which rendered it out of commission, and ISIS and the local residents being unable to repair it have led to economic and social fallouts that affected the lives of the local residents profoundly and directly. People's movement between the suburbs and the city was heavily restricted, as well as between the villages and the towns in the eastern and western suburbs, which, in turn, affected the economic life, and caused a noticeable stagnation in markets which impeded the civilians' ability to secure their daily needs especially in the villages that rely on markets in al Bokamal and al Mayadin cities. Also, this affected the health sector, with hospitals and medical centers being centered in the main cities, and transferring patients and the wounded have become a complicated endeavor, particularly ambulatory cases. Local residents had to use boats to cross the river, but this led to terrifyingly high costs, not to mention that some boats had drowned.

Abu Haydar, a resident from al Sh-heil town in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour whom we contacted via WhatsApp, told SNHR that he goes to so much trouble just to move between his town and al Mayadin city, and that he has to pay a sum of money every time he passes the river: "I pay 100 Syrian pounds to go from one bank to the other, and if I want to transfer my motorbike, the price doubles. Anyone who wants to transfer his car has to pay 500 Syrian pounds, not to mention the long, difficult road, and the risk of the heavy bombardment by the Syrian regime forces warplanes. Many boats sank on account of it overloading."



The most notable bridges that are targeted are al Bokamal Bridges and al Mayadin Bridge that connects the towns and villages of the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour. Also, there is al Siyasiya Bridge which is located in north of Deir Ez-Zour city, and is the only entrance to the city, considering that the southern entrance is under the control of Syrian regime forces.

Fadel Abdul Ghany, chairman of SNHR, says:

“Destroying bridges in this careless manner supports ISIS’s discourse in the minds of the local residents about how the international coalition doesn’t care for their interests or about protecting them. The ramifications of destroying all of these bridges were catastrophic for the residents and their work and livelihood, especially after Deir Ez-Zour got overpopulated with many Iraqi families fleeing al Mosul. In contrast, these bombings had a limited impact on ISIS, as we didn’t record that these bridges were used regularly in military operations.”

III. Executive Summary

SNHR documented no less than 29 incidents of attack on bridges in Deir Ez-Zour governorate from March 2011 until March 2017. These attacks are distributed by the perpetrator party as follows:

- Syrian regime forces: nine
- International coalition forces: 15
- Russian forces: one
- Extremist Islamic groups: 2
 - o ISIS: 1
 - o Fateh al Sham Front (formerly al Nusra Front): 1
- Other parties: 2

These attacks damaged 19 bridges at least. Of those, 14 bridges were rendered out of commission. All of the attack occurred in ISIS-held areas.

IV. Details

A. Syrian regime forces

Al Mayadin Bridge

One of the most important bridges in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour. The bridge connects the villages and towns of the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour with each other -between “Jazira” villages and “Shamiya” villages.

Tuesday, November 4, 2014, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired a missile at al Mayadin Bridge in the suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour. The bridge was damaged as well as



two shops which are located near the bridge.

Al Baath Bridge (al Ateeq)

Connects al Hwyqa and al Ardi neighborhoods inside Deir Ez-Zour city. The bridge is built above the small sub-river inside the city. The bridge has been frequently bombed since 2012 with mortar and artillery shells by Syrian regime forces, which slightly damaged it.



Destruction in [Al Baath Bridge](#) (Al Ateeq) in the aftermath of a shelling by Syrian regime forces at the end of 2012

[Video](#) showing al Jesr al Ateeq being targeted in Deir Ez-Zour city by Syrian regime forces, January 28, 2013



Al Bseira Bridge

Located on al Khabour River in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour. The bridge connects between al Bseira city and the towns of the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour.

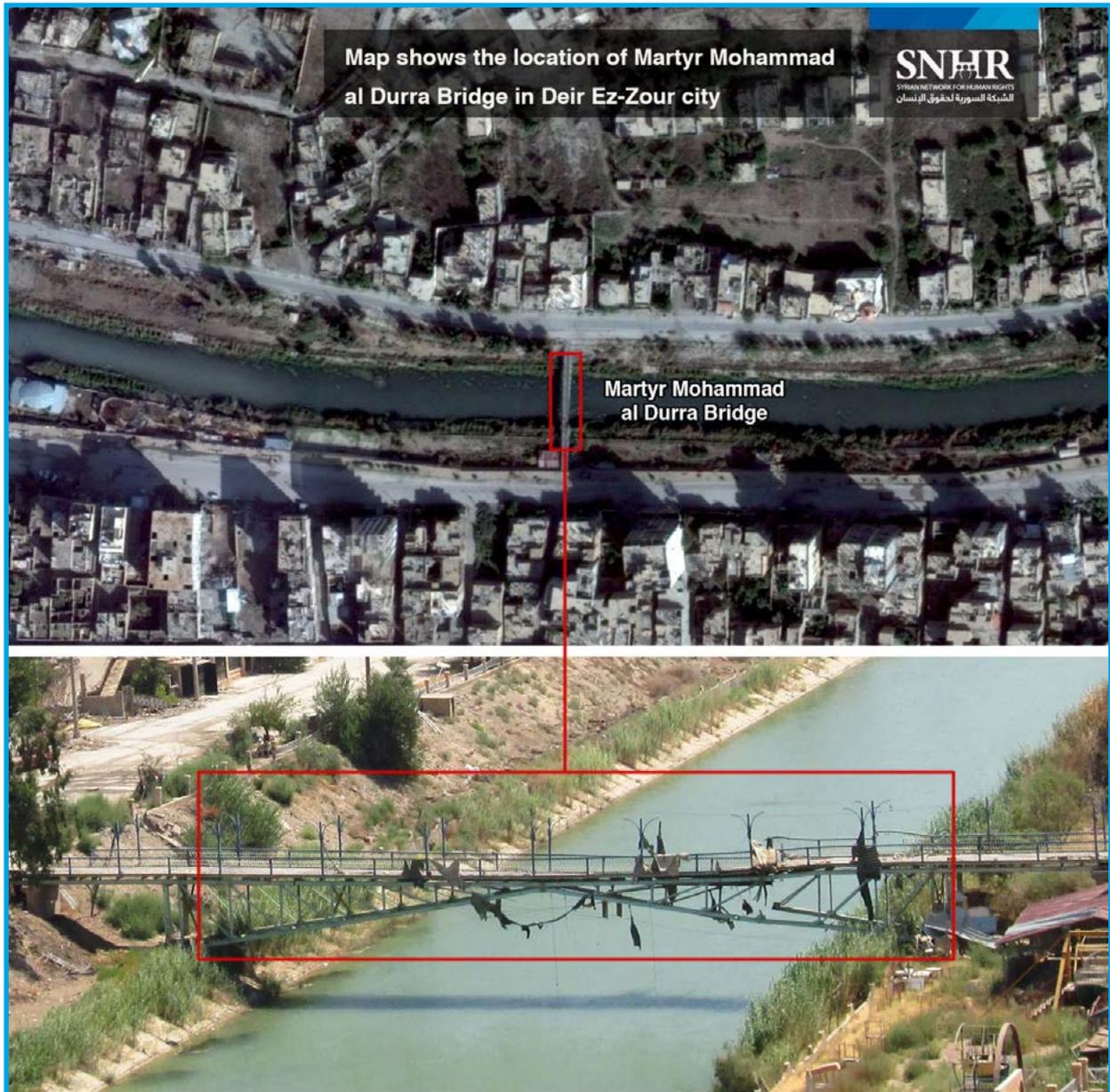
Tuesday, October 18, 2016, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes bombed Jesr al Bseira, and destroyed a part of it.



The Martyr Mohammad al Durra Bridge

Connects between al Hwyqa neighborhood and the rest of the neighborhoods of Deir Ez-Zour city. This bridge is a metal bridge that is built above the small sub-river in Deir Ez-Zour city. The bridge has been frequently bombed since early-2012 with mortar and artillery shells by Syrian regime forces, which slightly damaged it.





Al Siyasiya Bridge

The largest of the bridges that are built above Euphrates River. The bridge connects between Deir Ez-Zour city and its suburbs. The bridge was targeted five times at least.

The first incident: Monday, September 15, 2014, we recorded that a part of [al Siyasiya Bridge](#) was destroyed after a streak of explosions were heard. SNHR contacted an activist from the city who confirmed that the bridge was bombed by Syrian regime forces fighters after they sneaked into the bridge area, where they were the ones who recorded the bombing.



A pro-regime YouTube channel, [SyrianArmyTube](#), published a video showing the bombing and destruction of the bridge

The second incident: Monday, November 3, 2014, Syrian regime artillery fired seven shells at al Siyasiya Bridge, which ruptured its columns.

The third incident: Monday, February 23, 2015, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired two missiles that targeted al Siyasiya Bridge, which resulted in the killing of six individuals, and wounded three others. The airstrike also slightly damaged the bridge and burned three cars.

The fourth incident: Saturday, April 25, 2015, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired two missiles that targeted al Siyasiya Bridge. The bridge columns were damaged.

The fifth incident: Thursday, October 6, 2016, fixed-wing Syrian regime forces warplanes fired a number of missiles that targeted al Siyasiya Bridge. The bridge was destroyed, and was rendered out of commission.



ISIS's Amaq News Agency posted [a video](#) showing the destruction in the bridge structure



B. International coalition forces

Al Sekka Bridge in al Baq'an village

Located in al Ramadi village (al Baq'an) which follows the suburbs of al Bokamal city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour

The first incident: Friday, January 1, 2016, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired [two missiles](#) at "[al Sekka Bridge](#)". The bridge was rendered out of commission until ISIS rebuilt it.

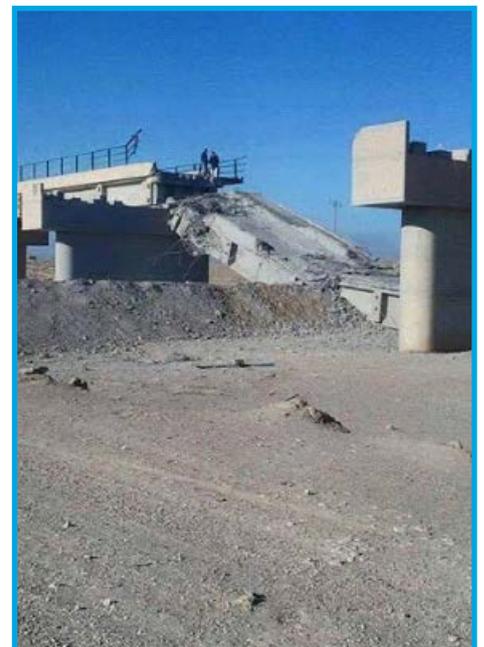
The second incident: Monday, March 6, 2017, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a [number of missiles](#) that targeted "[al Sekka Bridge](#)", rendering it out of commission.

Kasrat Abdullah al Sheihan Bridge

Connects al Salhiya village and al Twat-ha village in the suburbs of al Bokamal in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour which is under the control of ISIS.

The first incident: Friday, January 15, 2016, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired three missiles at "[Kasrat Abdullah al Sheihan Bridge](#)". The bridge was [destroyed heavily](#), and part of it collapsed. As a result, the bridge was rendered out of commission.

The second incident: Friday, September 30, 2016, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles that targeted "Kasrat Abdullah al Sheihan Bridge", which collapsed from its middle. The bridge has been out of commission since January 2016.



The destruction in Kasrat Abdullah al Sheihan bridge in the aftermath of an airstrike by international coalition forces, January 15, 2016



Al Qet'a Bridge

Located in al Mjawda village which follows al Bokamal county in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour which is under the control of ISIS. The bridge is a land bridge that connects al Mjawda village with the surrounding villages.

Saturday, October 1, 2016, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes bombed "al Qet'a Bridge" in al Mjawda village. The village was destroyed and was rendered out of commission.

Abdul Aziz al Faisal Bridge

Connects al Salhiya village (al Dwyer area) and M'iezy-la village, which follows al Bokamal city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour. The village is under the control of ISIS

Wednesday, September 14, 2016, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at "Abdul Aziz al Faisal" bridge, which was destroyed and rendered out of commission.

Sili Bridge

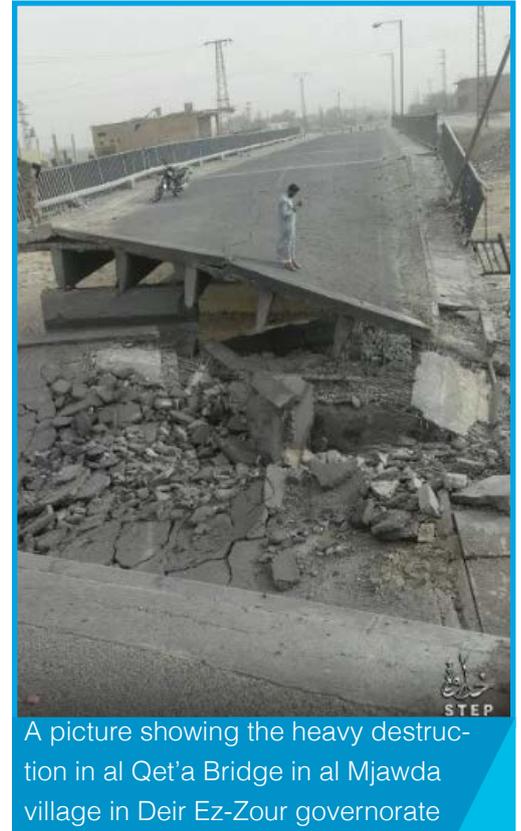
Located on the main road between the northern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour and the southern suburbs of al Hasaka. The road is under the control of ISIS.

Saturday, February 20, 2016, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles that targeted Sili Bridge. The bridge was heavily damaged, and was rendered out of commission.

Al Makhtam Bridge

A pedestrian walkway above the irrigation canal in Buqrus Badiya in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour. The Badiya is under the control of ISIS.

Thursday, September 8, 2016, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired two missiles at [al Makhtam Bridge](#) in Buqrus Badiya. The bridge was destroyed and rendered out of commission.



Al Mayadin Bridge

One of the most important bridges in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour. The bridge connects the villages and towns of the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour with each other -between “Jazira” villages and “Shamiya” villages-

[A map](#) showing the location of al Mayadin Bridge in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour

Tuesday, September 27, 2016, fixed-wing [international coalition forces](#) warplanes fired a [number of missiles](#) at “al Mayadin Bridge” in al Mayadin city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour. The bridge was [partially destroyed](#), and was rendered out of commission. [The destruction](#) that resulted from a bombing by fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes, September 27, 2016



ISIS's Amaq News Agency posted [a video](#) showing the great destruction in al Mayadin Bridge

Abu Ahmad, a taxi driver from al Mayadin city whom we contacted via WhatsApp, told SNHR that he woke up to the sound of a number of explosions around 00:30, which was followed by the sound of two planes soaring: “Before the bombing, a small white warplane was soaring at a high altitude in the morning, and then two warplanes at night, from 7 to 10, and then the bombing took place after midnight.”

“I went early in the morning to the bridge area. However, ISIS checkpoints were at the bridge entrance and prevented us from heading there, as it collapsed from the middle.”

Al Ashara Bridge

Located in al Ashara city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour. The bridge connects the villages of the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour –“Jazira” villages and “Shamiya” villages. The first incident: Wednesday, September 28, 2016, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at al Ashara Bridge. The bridge collapsed from the middle and was rendered out of commission before it was rebuilt in early-2017.

[A map](#) showing the location of al Ashara bridge in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour

ISIS's Amaq news agency posted [a video](#) showing civilians talking about the bombing on al Ashara Bridge



The destruction in al Ashara bridge after a bombing by international coalition forces warplanes, September 28, 2016



The second incident: Thursday, March 16, 2017, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at [al Ashara Bridge](#). The bridge collapsed from the middle, and was rendered out of commission.

Al Treif Bridge

A land bridge located on Deir Ez-Zour – al Raqqa road in al Treif village in the western suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour.

Friday, September 30, 2016, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles that targeted “[al Treif Bridge](#)”. The bridge was partially destroyed and was rendered out of commission.

Al Nawwam Bridge

Connects al Kabr town and Jazrat al Bohmeid village in the western suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour.

Saturday, October 1, 2016, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles that targeted “al Nawwam Bridge”. The bridge collapsed from the middle and was rendered out of commission.

Al Sour Bridge

Located in al Sour city in the northern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour. The bridge connects the villages of the northern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour over the two banks of al Khabour River.

Wednesday, October 19, 2016, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles that targeted [the bridge](#), and destroyed a part of it.

A dirt bridge “under construction”

Tuesday, March 14, 2017, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at a bridge that is being constructed on Euphrates River “A bridge based on a culvert system” in al Mayadin city in the eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour. The bridge was heavily damaged. ISIS has been working on building this bridge for months after the international coalition forces destroyed al Mayadin city, rendering it out of commission.



C. Russian forces

Al Siyasiya Bridge

Tuesday, November 3, 2015, fixed-wing international coalition forces warplanes fired a number of missiles at al Siyasiya Bridge at the main entrance of Deir Ez-Zour city from the north side. The bridge was slightly damaged. The area is under the control of ISIS.

D. Extremist Islamic groups

ISIS

Al Siyasiya Bridge

Sunday, November 6, 2016, ISIS bombed what was left of al Siyasiya Bridge with using explosive devices to destroy it completely. Al Siyasiya Bridge was previously targeted a number of times by Syrian regime forces and Russian warplanes.

Ahmad Taleb, a youngster from Hatla village near the north entrance of Deir Ez-Zour city, told SNHR, via WhatsApp, that three fixed-wing warplanes were soaring on Thursday above Deir Ez-Zour city and firing missiles. The bridge was targeted nearly at 14:30: “The explosions shook our house. We felt like the bombing was in our village because of its intensity. I learned that the bombing targeted al Siyasiya Bridge and destroyed what was left of it.”

Fateh al Sham Front

Knamat Bridge

Knamat Bridge is located over small sub-river in Deir Ez-Zour city

Tuesday, September 18, 2012, al Nusra Front fighters (currently Fateh al Sham Front) bombed Knamat bridge using explosive devices in order to cut the supply road between the Syrian regime forces stationing at al Syouf Circle and the Political Security branch. The bridge was destroyed completely, and was rendered out of commission.

The bridge area was, at the time of the incident, under the control of Syrian regime forces, whereas it is currently under the control of ISIS.

[A map](#) showing Knamat Bridge's location



E. Other parties

The Suspension Bridge

The Suspension Bridge is one of the oldest bridges in Deir Ez-Zour city, and a significant archeological area. The bridge is located above a small sub-river in al Hwyqa neighborhood in Deir Ez-Zour city. The bridge connects Deir Ez-Zour and its suburbs.

Thursday, May 2, 2013, unknowns bombed "[The Suspension Bridge](#)" using explosive devices. The bridge was [cut from the middle](#) and [destroyed completely](#). As a result, the bridge was rendered [out of commission](#). The bridge area was, at the time of the incident, under the control of Syrian regime forces, whereas it is currently under the control of ISIS. The destruction in [the Suspension Bridge](#) in Deir Ez-Zour city after it was bombed by unknowns, May 2, 2013



The Martyr Girl Eman Hajou Bridge

A metal bridge for pedestrians that was built above the small sub-river that connects al Hwyqa neighborhood with the rest of Deir Ez-Zour city's neighborhoods.

Wednesday, July 25, 2012, unknowns bombed "the Martyr Girl Eman Hajou Bridge" in al Hwyqa neighborhood using explosive devices. The bridge was destroyed completely, and was rendered out of commission.

The bridge area was, at the time of the incident, under the control of Syrian regime forces, whereas it is currently under the control of ISIS.

[A video](#) showing the destruction in the Martyr Girl Eman Hajou Bridge

[A map](#) showing the location of the Martyr Girl Eman Hajou Bridge



V. Conclusions and Recommendations

The bridges that were bombed by the international coalition forces and the Syrian regime haven't been used regularly in an abnormal manner for military purposes. Therefore, they shouldn't be a target. This constitutes a breach of the international humanitarian law (Protocol I – Article 56, and Protocol II, Article 15)

- The indiscriminate, disproportionate bombardment is an explicit breach of the international humanitarian law. The crime of indiscriminate murder amounts to war crimes.

The bombardment has resulted in collateral damages that involved loss of civilian lives, injuring them, or heavily damaging civilian objects. There are strong indicators that compel the belief that the damage was too excessive compared with the anticipated military benefit.

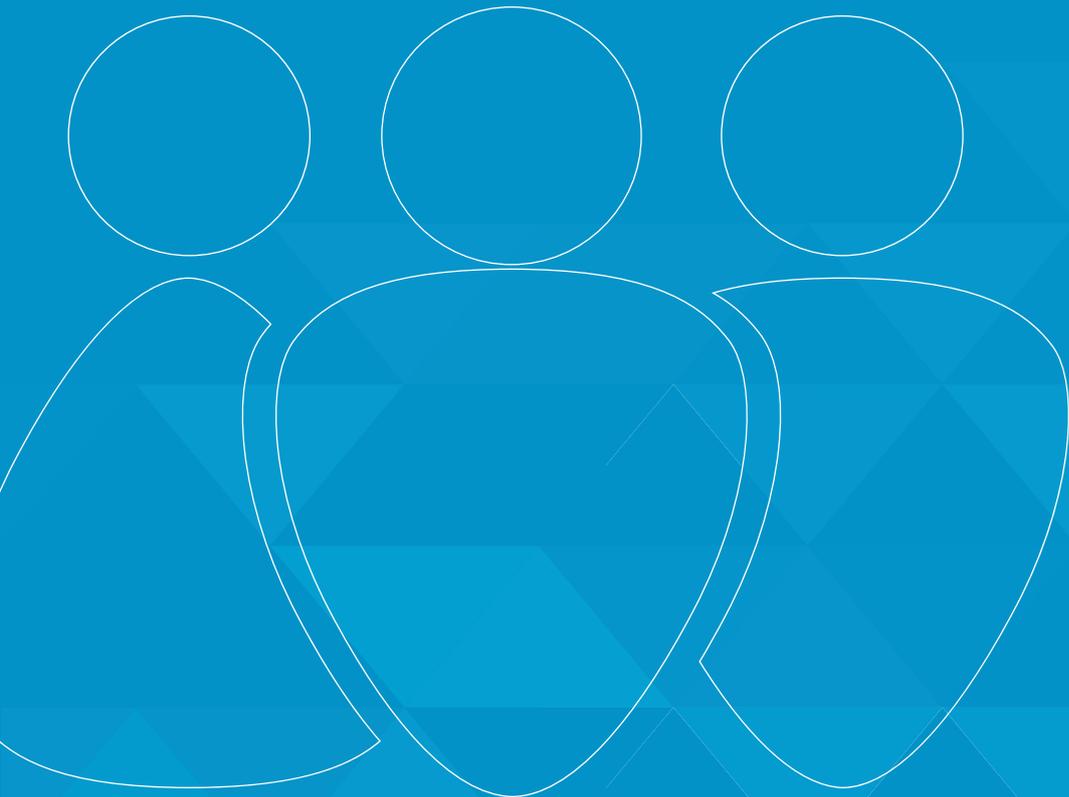
Recommendations

- All parties must respect the international humanitarian law and the customary international law, and have to bear the consequences of all the violations, and try as hard as possible to avoid a reoccurrence.
- Those who were involved in these incidents must be held accountable. Also, investigations must be launched that would clarify and reveal the criteria for targeting the bridges by the attacking forces, and prove its regular use for military purposes.
- The local residents must be compensated for the material, health, and moral damages they suffered. All efforts must be made to achieve that as soon as possible.

Acknowledgment

We would like to thank all Deir Ez-Zour residents, activists, and eyewitnesses who effectively contributed to this report.





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