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Civilian Casualties Still Falling Despite the Establishing of a "De-escalation Zone in the South" and Diminishing the Intensity of Military Operations

A Report Summarizing Commitment of Parties to the Conflict to "De-escalation Zone" Agreement in Southern Syria



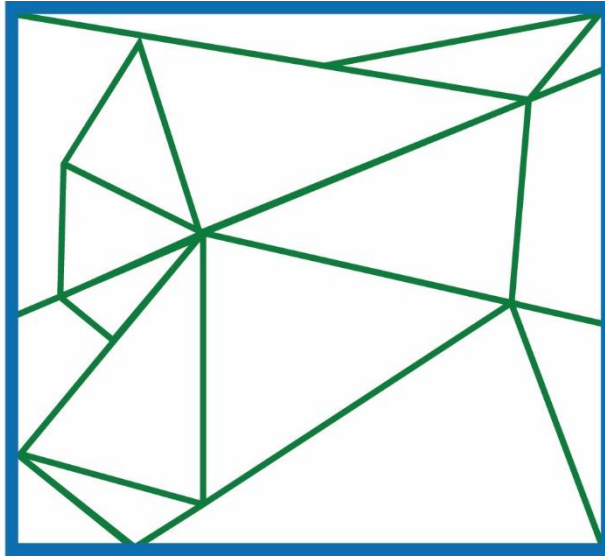
About Syrians for Truth and Justice/STJ

[Syrians for Truth and Justice /STJ](#) is a nonprofit, nongovernmental, independent Syrian organization. STJ includes many defenders and human rights defenders from Syria and from different backgrounds and affiliations, including academics of other nationalities.

The organization works for Syria, where all Syrians, without discrimination, should be accorded dignity, justice and equal human rights.

سوريون
من أجل
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والعدالة

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Preface

A number of cities and towns in Daraa Province witnessed a military escalation by the Syrian regular forces during December 2017, as the latter launched local-made ground-to-ground *Elephant* "Phil" missiles, and fired explosive cylinders towards areas under the control of the Syrian armed opposition specifically those in Daraa city, such as Tariq al-Sadd, Daraa al-Balad, and Mukhayam Daraa (Daraa camp) neighborhoods, which caused many civilian casualties, as well as the destruction of their property. According to a [Syrian for Truth and Justice \(STJ\)](#) reporter, the archaeological site [The Archeological Amphitheater of Daraa](#), which is located in Daraa al-Balad neighborhood, was devastated as a result of shelling by the Syrian regular forces on December 23, 2017.

According to many testimonies obtained by STJ in December 2017, the indiscriminate and deliberate shelling has declined significantly since the application of de-escalation zone agreement in South Syria on July 9, 2017, but it did not stop completely. Some cities and towns in Daraa have witnessed repeated shelling by the Syrian regular forces since the implementation of the convention, which resulted in killing up to 20 civilians and injury of dozens by light and medium weapons and mortars, which were randomly and/or deliberately fell on civilian houses in the areas of ([al-Harah](#), [Da'el](#), [Kafr Shams](#), [Ibtta](#) and Elmismyah town in Lajat area). Whereas the warplanes affiliated to Syrian regular forces and their allies were totally absent from the region's sky, but the reconnaissance aircrafts remained hovering, to monitor every movement in the Syrian armed opposition areas.

Moreover, several activists from Daraa reported that the Syrian regular forces have sent military reinforcements to the northern countryside of Daraa since November 2017, which may be intended to control the strategic and Syrian armed opposition –held hill of "[Jabal al Harrah](#)", which overlooks vast areas such as (al-Harah, Namar and Inkhil), which are under the opposition's control as well.



Military and Political Context

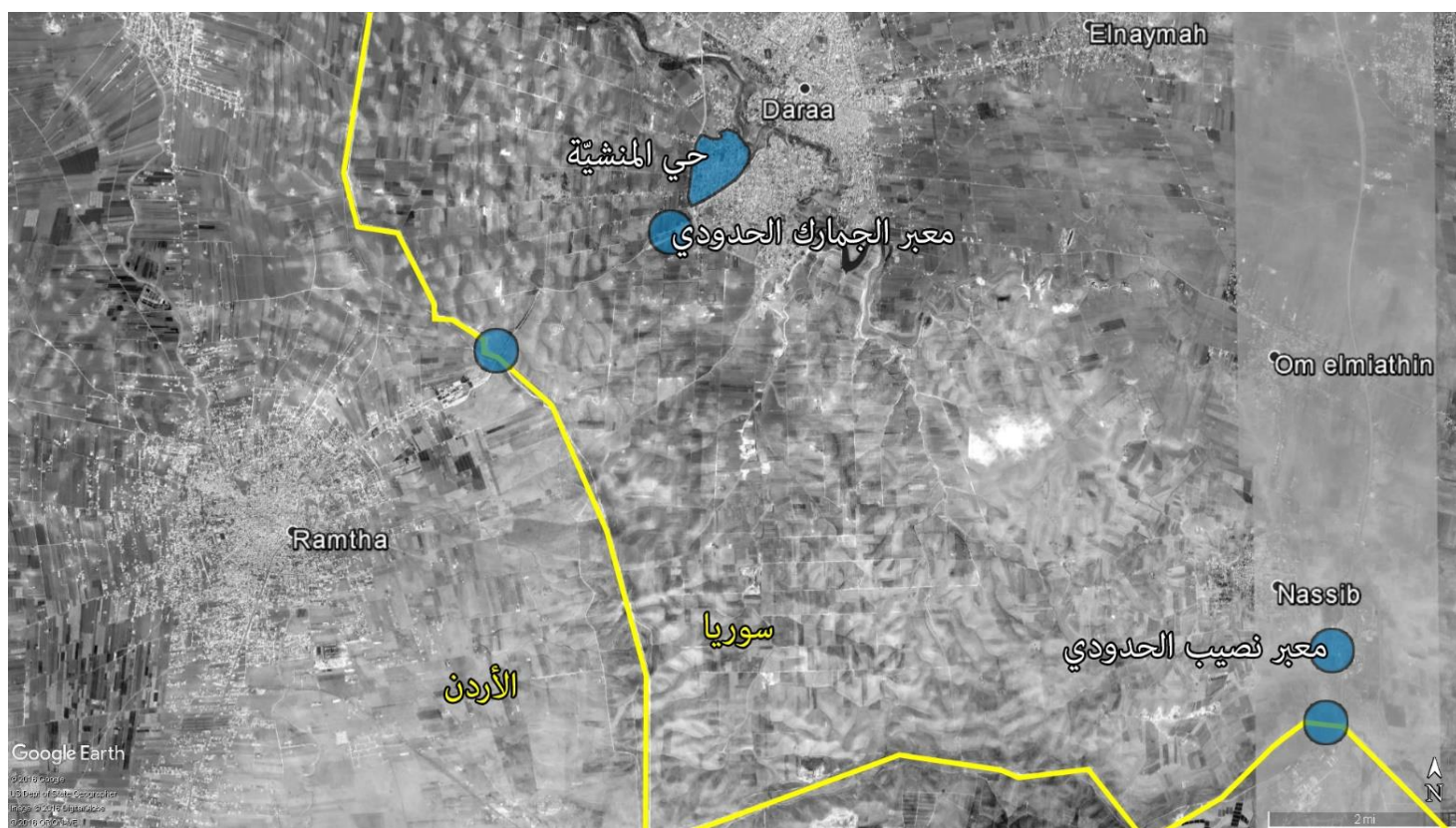
On September 14, 2017, the sixth round of the Astana conference was held in the capital of Kazakhstan, where the sponsor states (Russia, Turkey and Iran) reached an agreement on several points, according to a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) issued at the conclusion of the

The points included the announcement of the establishment of de-escalation zones pursuant to [the memorandum](#) dated on May 4, 2017. The zones included Eastern Ghouta and some parts of northern Homs province, Idlib province and some adjacent provinces (Latakia, Hama and Aleppo), in addition to some parts of southern Syria-not precisely identified-which have effectively entered de-escalation zones agreement on July 9, 2017, after the U.S, Russia and Jordan announced the start of [a truce](#) to ceasefire in south-western Syria. The truce includes Daraa and Al Qunaitra provinces, but until this moment the" ceasefire "area has not been defined geographically.

On August 23, 2017, the Russian Ministry of Defense [announced](#) the opening of the joint monitoring center of a de-escalation zone in southwestern Syria, in both Daraa and Al Qunaitra, in accordance with the agreements reached between Russia, the U.S. and Jordan.

Earlier in 2017, armed opposition factions represented by the operations room of "*al-Bunyan al Marsous*"¹, had taken control of the strategic "al-Manshiya" neighborhood in Daraa, near the old customs crossing on the Syrian-Jordanian border, after violent clashes against the Syrian regular forces on February 12, 2017. The latter had targeted armed opposition factions areas like (Tariq al-Sadd, Daraa al-Balad, and Mukhayam Daraa), using warplanes and incendiary bombs in order to prevent the opposition factions from controlling al-Manshiya neighborhood, which resulted in scores of civilian deaths and injuries.

¹ In late 2015, more than twenty armed factions announced the formation of a joint operations room under the name of the "al-Bunyan al Marsous" in order to coordinate the confrontation against the Syrian regular army forces in the eastern neighborhoods of Daraa. The factions are Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham/HTS, Shabab Asuna Forces, Yarmouk Army among others.



A map illustrates the location of al-Manshiya neighborhood in Daraa.

Despite the entry of the southern area in the de-escalation zones agreement on July 9, 2017, the Syrian regular forces continued their repeated shelling on armed opposition-areas controlled , but the latter used light and medium weapons and mortar shells. Armed clashes occurred between the two sides on July 14, 2017, resulting in the death and injury of a number of armed opposition fighters, according to a STJ reporter.



Image shows the destruction affected to civilians' houses in Daraa al-Balad neighborhood, after targeting it with "Elephant" rockets by the Syrian regular forces on December 23, 2017. Photo credit: STJ

First: Syrian Regular Forces Launch Ground-to-Ground Missiles towards Residential Neighborhoods in Daraa:

The Syrian regular forces launched five ground-to-ground "Elephant" missiles towards Syrian armed opposition areas, specifically Daraa al-Balad and Tariq al-Sadd neighborhoods , during December 2017 alone, injuring three civilians. Moreover, it targeted civilian houses with mortar shells, resulting in the death of a girl child identified as Suzan Ahmed al-Hammadi, and injuring others including children, according to STJ reporter. In this regard, **Ahmed Musa**, an activist from Daraa al-Balad neighborhood, spoke to STJ, saying:



"After the lull in fighting and the implementation of de-escalation zones agreement in southern Syria in July 2017, hundreds of families returned to Daraa al-Balad and Tariq al-Sadd neighborhoods, after being forced to live in the open or in refugee camps to flee the war. Nevertheless, the regime forces re-bombed them without committing to the announced convention. The artillery shelling was used on a daily basis and sometimes it was evolved into armed clashes with the armed opposition forces, and that is exactly what happened on July 16, 2017, just nine days after the application of the convention, when the outskirts of Al manshiya, with Daraa al-Balad and Tariq al-Sadd neighborhoods, in Daraa city, witnessed many clashes on the lines of contact between the regime forces and the opposition forces, which caused the death of more than nine fighters of the armed opposition."

Ahmed said that targeting civilian neighborhoods by artillery shells and mortars, along with sniping, did not subside during the five months following the implementation of de-escalation zones agreement in southern Syria. He pointed to a marked development in the use of weapons by the Syrian regular forces within December 2017, where *al-Seeba* neighborhood in Daraa al-Balad was targeted by four ground-to-ground "Elephant" missiles, specifically on 11 and 23 December 2017, explaining that one of those rockets landed on an archaeological site to the west of al-Omari mosque in Daraa al-Balad, and the rest fall on residential buildings near al-Omari mosque, coinciding with the dropping of mortar shells on Tariq al-Sadd which caused the death of a girl child who was no more than eight months, and injured other civilian. Ahmad said:

"There are no military headquarters in the places that have been targeted by the Regime forces. On December 30, 2017, the latter targeted residential neighborhoods in Tariq al-Sadd with a ground-to-ground "Elephant" missile, causing material damage only. On December 28, 2017, houses in Tariq al-Sadd neighborhood were targeted with two high-explosive cylinders, injuring two civilians. In addition, on November 3, 2017, many civilians injured after they finished the Friday prayers in one of Daraa al-Balad mosques, as a result of dropping artillery shells."



According to STJ reporter, the neighborhoods under the control of the armed opposition, such as (Daraa al-Balad, Tariq al-Sadd, country, Mukhayam Daraa) had witnessed the return of many families coming from refugee camps in Jordan or even random camps set up near the border of Jordan, the more likely civilian casualties increased as a result of the military escalation on these neighborhoods by the Syrian regular forces where more than six civilians killed and dozens injured in those areas since the start of the de-escalation agreement in southern Syria.



Image shows the scale of destruction affected to (The Archeological Amphitheater of Daraa) in Daraa al-Balad neighborhood, after being targeted with "Elephant" rockets by the Syrian regular forces on December 11, 2017.

Photo credit: STJ



Image shows a side of civilian houses destruction in Daraa al-Balad neighborhood, after being targeted with "Elephant" rockets by the Syrian regular forces on December 23, 2017.

Photo credit: STJ

Second: Violation of De-escalation Agreement in Several Cities of Daraa Province:

According to STJ reporter, various areas of Daraa province had been violently bombed by the Syrian regular forces in the months following the application of the "de-escalation zone" agreement in southern Syria in July 2017. On December 17, 2017, Syrian regular forces targeted a motorcycle on the road between Kafr Shams and *Umm al`Awsaj towns*, resulting in the death of two civilians who were working at a poultry farm.



On October 19, 2017, an artillery shelling launched from Tall ash Sha`ar area in al-Qunaitra countryside towards civilian houses in the city of al-Harah, resulted in the death of a 12-year-old child, and the injury of three civilians.

The central countryside of Daraa province also witnessed semi-daily shelling, especially on the towns of Dael and Ibtta, where the artillery shelling on Ibtta, on September 25, 2017, resulted in the death of a woman and the injury of two others. On October 7, 2017, Al-Masmiyah town in Lajat area in the eastern countryside of Daraa was subjected also to artillery shelling which claimed the lives of three people, including a child, from one family.

Third: The Syrian Regular Forces Sending Military Reinforcements to the Northern Countryside of Daraa:

According to many testimonies of Daraa province activists, Syrian regular forces have brought military vehicles and reinforcements to northern Daraa countryside since the beginning of November 2017. Noting that there is apprehension of impending military action by the latter to control al-Harah city which is next to the strategic hill "Jabal al Harrah", held by the Syrian armed opposition, because it oversees large areas under the control of the opposition as well, such as (Jasim, al-Harah, Namar, Naba Alsakher and Inkhil). In this regard, Jawad Abu Hamza, an activist from Nawa city who is acquainted with the military situation in Daraa province, said:

"Syrian opposition factions in the northern countryside of Daraa observed unusual movements within the military units of the Syrian regime and the bringing of military reinforcements for weeks. Such reinforcements included heavy vehicles such as tanks, personnel carriers, as well as a number of field artillery guns, rocket launchers and infantry soldiers, most of them were stationed at "Jadieh" battalion in Jadieh village in the northern countryside of Daraa. The first attack was expected to be on Zimrin town, about 6 km away from the strategic hill "Jabal al Harrah". If the Syrian regular forces managed to reach "Jabal al Harrah" hill, which is higher than 1200 m above sea level, this means that many of the villages and towns under the control of the Syrian armed opposition, whether in Daraa or Al Qunaitra provinces, will lose militarily."



Forth: Civilian Casualties As a result of the Violations of De-escalation Zone Agreement in Daraa Province

For his part, STJ reporter documented the names of some civilian victims who had died because of the "de-escalation zone" agreement violations by the Syrian regular forces of in Daraa province during the period from July to December 2017. Violations include; indiscriminate shelling of civilian houses, a sniping accident, and the explosion of two bombs from the remnants of the Syrian regular forces' earlier shelling.

The documented victims are:

#	Date	Name	Place of Kill	Notes
1	December 17, 2017.	Zakaria Fahd al-Sa'adi	Kafr Shams	Syrian regular forces shelling
2	December 17, 2017.	Muhammed Mustafa al-Zarqan	Kafr Shams	
3	December 13, 2017.	Ahmed Yusuf al-Qawareet	Al Harah	Explosion of a cluster bomb.
4	December 11, 2017.	The girl child Suzan Ahmed al-Hamadi	Tariq al-Sadd	
5	November 16, 2017.	Muhammed Khaled Nawaf al-Shanour	Eeastern Karak	
6	October 29, 2017.	Muhammed Nazal Qadro	Ataman	Snipping by Syrian regular forces.
7	October 19, 2017.	The child Muhammed Sameer Sabra	Al Harah	
8	October 19, 2017.	Ruqayyah Awad al-Shammari	Al Harah	From Inkhil town



9	October 14, 2017.	The child Mouayad Ahmed al- Sallakh	Daraa al-Balad	
10	October 7, 2017.	Ammar Badran	Al-Masmiyah town/ Lajat area	From Douma city.
11	October 7, 2017.	The child Muhammed Ammar Badran	Al-Masmiyah town/ Lajat area	From Douma city.
12	October 7, 2017.	Khitam Badran	Al-Masmiyah town/ Lajat area	From Douma city.
13	September 26, 2017.	The child Hasan Qasem al- Mahameed	Daraa al-Balad	Explosion of a cluster bomb
14	September 25, 2017.	Quaider Musa'ab al- Kharsan	Daraa al-Balad	From Nawa city.
15	September 25, 2017.	Asmahan Yaseen al- Hariri	Ibtta	
16	September 24, 2017.	Hasan Ibrahim al- Talha	Daraa al-Balad	From Nawa city.
17	September 12, 2017.	Adnan Qasem al- Krrad	Tariq al-Sadd	A media activist.
18	September 5, 2017.	Mudar al-Aswad	Daraa al- Mahatta	Indiscriminate shootings by Syrian regular forces.
19	August 14, 2017.	Adel Abdul Hamid Al-Rifa`	Eastern Ghariyah	Indiscriminate shootings by Syrian regular forces.
20	July 26, 2017.	Hiba Fawaz al- Kumaiti	Daraa al- Mahatta	Indiscriminate shootings by Syrian regular forces.



STJ reporter has also documented the names of some Syrian armed opposition dead, during the period from July to December 2017, as a result of direct clashes with the Syrian regular forces and of the latter's shelling of the areas under the control of the Syrian armed opposition factions. The names are:

#	Date	Name	Place of Kill	Notes
1	December 23, 2017.	Noureddin Dahi al-Subaihi	Ataman	
2	December 14, 2017.	Ala'a Adnan al-Bahri	Mukhayam Daraa	A Palestinian refugee
3	December 9, 2017.	Yusuf Khaled al-Alwah	Daraa al-Balad	As a result of a clash.
4	December 2, 2017.	Uday Basem al-Masalmeh	Daraa al-Balad	As a result of Syrian regular forces shelling
5	November 4, 2017.	Ahmed Abdullah al-Masalmeh	Daraa al-Balad	
6	December 29, 2017.	Muhammed al-Rasheed	Sharaie town/Lajat area	A guided missile fired by Syrian regular forces.
7	December 29, 2017.	Amer al-Rasheed	Sharaie town/Lajat area	A guided missile fired by Syrian regular forces.
8	December 29, 2017.	Fahd al-Rasheed	Sharaie town/Lajat area	A guided missile fired by Syrian regular forces.
9	December 29, 2017.	Muhammed al-Salamah	Sharaie town/Lajat	A guided missile fired by Syrian regular



			area	forces.
10	December 29, 2017.	Ahmed Muhammed Fatoom	Al Manshiya neighborhood	From Tal Shihab village.
11	December 29, 2017.	Ahmed Sulaiman Abazeed	Al Manshiya neighborhood	
12	September 30, 2017.	Anas Farhan al- Masalmeh	Al Manshiya neighborhood	
13	September 25, 2017.	Muhammed Hasan al- Sayasnah	Al Manshiya neighborhood	
14	August 16, 2017.	Uday Jihad al-Awad	Al Sheikh Maskin	Ambushed by Syrian Regular Forces
15	August 16, 2017.	Hashim Hamdi al- Aqaylah	Al Sheikh Maskin	Ambushed by Syrian Regular Forces
16	July 16, 2017.	Muhammed Shareef al-Ahdab	Al manshiya neighbourhood	From Homs city.