

## Civilian Casualties in Military Confrontations between Syrian Liberation Front/SLF and Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham/HTS

Special Report Highlighting the Recent Fighting between Armed Factions in Idlib and Aleppo  
Countryside during February and March 2018

## About Syrians for Truth and Justice/STJ

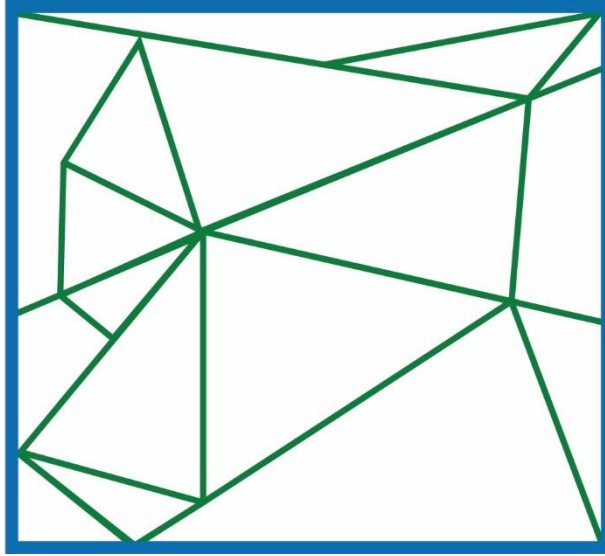
[Syrians for Truth and Justice /STJ](#) is a nonprofit, nongovernmental, independent Syrian organization. STJ includes many defenders and human rights defenders from Syria and from different backgrounds and affiliations, including academics of other nationalities.

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

سوريون  
من أجل  
الحقيقة  
والعدالة  

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Syrians  
For Truth  
& Justice





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## Preface

On February 20, 2018, armed confrontations broke out between Hayat Tahrir al-Sham/HTS former al-Nusra Front<sup>1</sup>, on one hand, and the newly formed Syrian Liberation Front/SLF Jabhat Tahrir Syria<sup>2</sup> on the other hand, in several towns and cities in Aleppo countryside, such as (A`ajel, Tekad, Jam`iyat al-Kahraba, Abzemo, Basartoun, Tadil, Kafar Naha) and then extended to include several towns and cities in the countryside of Idlib, such as Ariha, AdDana, Sarmada, Ma`rrat Misrin, in addition to the border towns in the northern countryside of Idlib, including Atimah, Kah, Dier Hassan, Salwah and Kfar Lusin.

These confrontations, which later escalated into using heavy and medium weapons, were the result of serious disagreements and provocations between the two parties. These confrontations caused the death and injury of scores of civilians in several areas of Aleppo and Idlib, as well as considerable material damage to their properties,

according to [Syrians for Truth and Justice/STJ](#) field researcher.

Days after the outbreak of these confrontations, specifically on February 28, 2018, HTS agents kidnapped two volunteers from Mollham Volunteering Team in Idlib, they are: (Muhammad Noor Tahan and Suleiman Taleb), due to random accusations made against them. According to one of the team members, their fate remained unknown until releasing Suleiman Taleb on March 3, 2018 and Mohamed Noor Tahan on March 8, 2018.

<sup>1</sup> On January 28, 2017, several jihadist factions in north Syria announced the merger under the name of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham/ HTS and the factions that declared the dissolution and the merger under the new name is Fatah Al-sham Front- former Nusra Front, Nur al-Din al-Zenki Movement, Liwaa al-Haqq Ansar Din front and Jaish Sunnah. However, against the backdrop of the recent outbreak of confrontations between Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya Movement and HTS in north of Syria on July 15, 2017, the Nour al-Din al-Zanki Movement announced its separation from HTS on July 20, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> On February 18, 2018, [the formation of the Syrian Liberation Front was announced](#) through the merger of several factions of the Syrian armed opposition the most important of these are the Nour-al-Din al-Zenki Movement and Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya Movement. Syrian Liberation Front is present in several areas in Aleppo and Idlib countryside.



Many civilians demonstrated in Aleppo and Idlib, calling for sparing civilians and residential areas from the fighting. People of several of those towns managed to expel the checkpoints of HTS, which located at the entrance of their towns, as in Ma`rrat Misrin and Mastomah in Idlib countryside, in Late February 2018 .

As STJ field researcher confirmed, these clashes are still ongoing, till the date of ending the present report on March 14, 2018, in several areas of western Aleppo, such as (Basserton, A`ajel, and Orum Al-Kubrah), as well as the surroundings towns like Ma'arat Nu`man in Idlib countryside, causing more civilian casualties, and a state of panic and fear among the locals, particularly, after they led to almost complete paralysis of civilian life. In addition to the continued use of heavy weapons by the conflict parties, which became a concern for the people of those areas.

It is noteworthy that it is not the first time that military confrontations erupted between the Syrian armed opposition factions in Aleppo and Idlib countryside. However, in November 2017, STJ prepared a report in which it documented [civilian casualties resulting military confrontations between HTS and Nour al-Din al-Zenki Movement in the western countryside of Aleppo](#) on November 8, 2017.

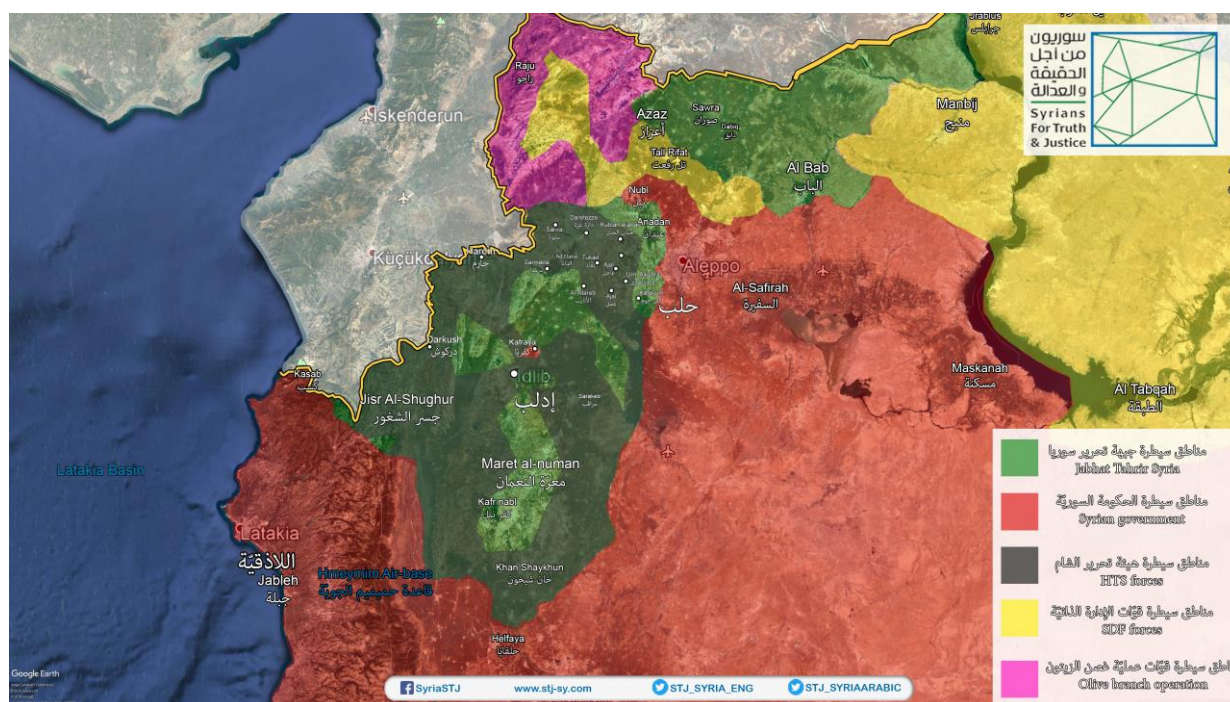
That was preceded by other confrontations between HTS and Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya in Idlib, on July 15, 2017, which resulted in many civilian casualties as well, according to [a previous report](#) prepared by STJ.



## • Political and Military Context

HTS controls several cities and towns in western Aleppo, including Khan al-Asal, Urum As Sughra, Rif al-Muhandisin and Kafr Halab, Tawamah, Abzemo, Kafr Karmin, Kafer Naseh, Tadil, Babkah, Babto, and Abin. It also controlled many towns in Idlib countryside such as Danah, Sarmada, Atimah, Ma'rret Misrin and Salqen, on February 28, 2018, 16 military battalions split up from HTS in the northern countryside of Aleppo and joined the ranks of Failaq al-Sham<sup>3</sup>.

On the other hand, HTS controls other areas in the western countryside of Aleppo, such as Qabtn, Bashkateen, Basserton, Tkad, Kafer Da'al, Anjarah, Kafrnaha, Jam'iyat al-Kahraba, A'wejel and A'ajel, and it also controlled several areas in the countryside of Idlib (Kafr Rumah, Ma'arat Numan, Maar Shimmsreen, and Babilla).



Map showing the distribution of control areas in Aleppo and Idlib until March 14, 2018

<sup>3</sup> It was formed on March 10, 2014, it is one of the largest factions of the Syrian armed opposition, and is one of the largest formations of the military opposition delegation participant in Astana talks about Syria. It is located in several areas, including the southern and northern countryside of Idlib, the western countryside of Aleppo and the northern countryside of Homs.



Image showing the statement issued by Failaq al-Sham on February 28, 2018, in which it welcomed the accession of 13 battalions, which had defected from HTS, to its ranks.

Photo credit: [The official account of Failaq al-Sham on Twitter](#).



## First: Reasons and Background of the Disagreement:

On February 20, 2018, confrontations erupted between Syrian Liberation Front/SLF on the one hand and HTS on the other, as a result of the latter's arresting a number of SLF agents while passing one of its military checkpoints in the western countryside of Aleppo. As a result, SLF issued a statement condemning the arrest of its agents by HTS and the latter's attacking several areas and towns, where SLF agents are presented in the western countryside of Aleppo.



Statement issued by SLF on February 20, 018.

Photo credit: [Idlib al-Hadath](https://www.idlib.al-hadath.com/).





In response, SLF arrested number of HTS agents while passing one of its checkpoints in its controlled areas, in the western countryside of Aleppo. In addition, HTS indicted earlier that Nour al-Din al-Zenki Movement (a main faction from those forming SLF) assassinated one of its agents, "Abu Ayman al-Masri", on a checkpoint run by Nour al-Din al-Zenki Movement in the town of al-Hutah in western Aleppo, on February 15, 2018.

**بيان**

**تعليقاً على حادثة مقتل أبي أيمن المصري تقبله الله !**

الحمد لله القائل: ﴿وَمَنْ قُتِلَ مَظْلُومًا فَقَدْ جَعَلْنَا لَرِوَيْهِ سَاعَةً لَا يُمْسِرُ فِي الْقَتْلِ إِنَّهُ كَانَ مَنْصُورًا﴾ [الإسراء: ٢٣] .. **وبعد ..**

فلقد فُجِعنا بمقتل الأخ الخلق المجاهد **أبي أيمن المصري** تقبله الله وأعلى نُزله ..

حيث قُتل بعد مروره بحاجز لحركة نور الدين الزنكي، ولقد قرأنا ما ذكره الإخوة في الزنكي في بيان الملبسات حيث ذكروا أن الأخ لم يتوقف، فأطلق النار بالهواء، ثم قتل !

ونحن في هذا البيان لسنا في معرض القضاء في القضية ..

فإننا نطلب من إخواننا في الزنكي أن يجلسوا مع إخوانهم في الهيئة جلسة قضائية عاجلة يحددون فيها قاضياً بينهم، ويقدم فيه عناصر الحاجز للقضاء، ويُزَع فتيل الفتنة، وتُحَقن الدماء ..

ولئن كنا فُجِعنا بمقتل أخينا؛ فالفاجعة الأشد أن يكون دم أخينا سبباً لسيل بحر دماء بين الطرفين **(لا قدر الله)** .

ونذكر إخواننا من الطرفين بقول الله تعالى: ﴿وَكُنْ فِي الْفَصَاصِ حَيَّةً تَأْوِي الْأَيْتِبَ لَمَلَكُم تَسْعُونَ﴾ [البقرة: ١٧٩] ..

ففي الآية بين الله تعالى أن القصاص حياة، وذلك أن من قُتل له قَتيل؛ فليس أمامه سوى خيارين: **أولهما:** أن يقتص بطريقة الجاهلية، وهي أن يأخذ ثاره بيده، ويحشد جنوده ويقاتل، من دون طلب للشرع ولا للقضاء، وهذه الطريقة تجعل الطرف المتهم بالقتل يرد، ثم يرد الآخر فتسيل الدماء.

**ثانيهما:** أن يأخذ ولي الدم حقه بتحكيم شرع الله بينه وبين خصمه، بأن يترافعا للقضاء فيقضي القاضي بينهما، فيرد الحق لصاحبه، وهذا نهج أتباع الهدى، لذلك سماه الله **(حياة)**؛ لأنه لا تسيل به دماء كثيرة، بل تحيا به الأنفس وتُحَقن به الدماء ..

**أخيراً:** نفتي الجنود من الطرفين أن أي قتال لا يدعى قبله لمحكمة شرعية واضحة، فهو قتال محرم وسفك للدماء المعصومة بغير الحق وتوريط للنفس بكبيرة من أشد الكبائر في دين الله ..

هذا ما ندعو إليه إخواننا في هيئة تحرير الشام وحركة الزنكي .. وفقهما الله لكل هدى، وعصمهما الله من كل ضلالة وردى.

**مصطفى العلياني**      **عبدالله المحيسني**

Image showing the comment made by Musleh al-Aliani and "Abdullah al-Mahseni", a former Sharia officer, on February 16, 2018, on the killing of a member of HTS "Abu Ayman al-Masri" by Nour al-Din al-Zenki Movement.

Photo credit: Activists from Aleppo countryside.



## Second .Civilian Casualties as a Result of Military Confrontations between HTS and SLF

According to STJ field researcher, scores of civilians have been killed or injured as a result of military clashes between HTS and SLF as they use heavy and medium weapons in those clashes, in addition to material damage to their property. These clashes have led to almost complete paralysis of life in the towns of western countryside of Aleppo and Idlib countryside because of artillery shelling, rocket-propelled grenades and reckless firing between the two fighting parties.

In the western countryside of Aleppo, particularly in Jam`yat al-Kahraba located near the town of Khan al-Asal , a whole family, three children and their mother, was killed as a result of attacking their house with a rocket during the clashes between the two sides. [A video footage](#) published by activists on February 25, 2018, shows recovering their bodies in the western countryside of Aleppo.

In Idlib countryside, specifically in the vicinity of Ariha, on February 24, 2018, the young man (Samer Muhammad al-Mteiwee) injured in the neck due to the ongoing clashes between the two sides, which caused him to die instantly.



Image of the young victim (Samer Muhammad al-Mteiwee), killed in the clashes between HTS and SLF on February 24, 2018.

Photo credit: [Ariha and its countryside news page](#).

The child, Muhammad Walid Darwish, 13 years, is another victim of those clashes, he died on February 24, 2018. Muhammad is originally from Salwah town in the northern countryside of Idlib, and was living with his family in the vicinity of Atimah in the northern countryside of Idlib. In this regard, Uday al-Satouf, a media activist from Idlib countryside, said:

**"on that day at 7:00 a.m. fighters of HTS stationed in the vicinity of the family's house located on the top of one of the hills overlooking areas controlled by SLF, and as a result of exchanging fire with medium weapons and machine guns between the two parties, the child (Muhammad**



Walid Darwish) was injured in his head and died instantly. Anyway, those clashes led to a state of fear and panic among civilians, particularly displaced persons whom lived in tents in the vicinity of Atimah town in the northern countryside of Idlib. Many tents burned due to these clashes, one of which was housing a family of five members who were injured and burnt in varying degrees burns, so they were transferred to hospitals near the area. However, Atimah people demonstrated calling HTS to leave their town and asking the two parties to spare civilians from the armed conflicts and indiscriminate shelling" .



Image of the victim child (Muhammad Walid Darwish) died in the military clashes on February 24, 2018.

Photo credit: [the activist Uday al-Satouf](#).







Image showing some of the displaced people's burned tents of in the vicinity of Atimah town in the northern countryside of Idlib.

Photo credit: [the activist Uday al-Satouf](#).

In Ma'rrat Misirin, in the northern countryside of Idlib, five civilians were killed on February 24, 2018, as a result of HTS's attacking the city and the crossfire and shelling between it and SLF. Safwat Hamdy, a media activist from Ma'rrat Misirin, confirmed this to STJ by saying:



**"This attack triggered military confrontations between the two sides, which caused a state of panic and fear among people, killed five civilians, and injured dozens, who were taken to the Red Crescent Hospital in the city. The dead were identified as (Ali Hannan Al-Omar, Mustafa Ali Hannan, Abdullah Nadaf, a victim of Al-Halabi, Hekmat Pro and Firas Hasan, who later died of his injuries after trying to treat him in a Turkish hospital.**



Image of the young victim (Firas Hasan) killed as a result of the military clashes between the two parties, which broke out on February 24, 2018.

Photo credit: activist Safwat al-Hamdy.





Image of the victim (Ali Hannan), killed as a result of the military clashes between the parties, which broke out on February 24, 2018.

Photo credit: activist Safwat al-Hamdy.





Image of the victim (Mustafa Ali Hannan), killed as a result of the military clashes between the two parties,  
which broke out on February 24, 2018.

Photo credit: activist Safwat al-Hamdy.



Image of the victim (Abdallah Nadaf) killed as a result of the military clashes between the two parties,  
which broke out on February 24, 2018

Photo credit: activist Safwat al-Hamdy.



Image shows the victim Hekmat Pro, killed as a result of the military clashes between the two parties that broke out on 24 February 24, 2018.

Photo credit: activist Safwat al-Hamdy.

Al-Hamady pointed out that on February 28, 2018, a woman, named Amon Ahmad al-Dughim, was killed in the town of Atimah in the northern countryside of Idlib, as a result of the military clashes in that area as well.

According to STJ field researcher, HTS managed to control several towns in the western countryside of Aleppo on February 25, 2018, after days of military confrontations between it and



SLF. On February 26, 2018, HTS withdrew from those towns and from several towns under its control in the western countryside of Aleppo, for unknown reasons, such as the outskirts of Kafrnaha village, Rif al-Muhandisin, Jam`iyat al-Kahraba near the town of Khan al-Asel, Tadil, Urum As Sughra, and some important military positions in the western countryside of Aleppo such as the regiment (46). On February 27, 2018, the western countryside of Aleppo became completely devoid of any presence of HTS, which in turn withdrew to Idlib city and its border towns. According to STJ field researcher, only two days later, HTS returned to the areas where it withdrew in the western countryside of Aleppo and for reasons that are completely unknown .

## **Second: Abduction of two Volunteers from Mollham volunteer Team in Idlib**

On February 28, 2018, HTS kidnapped two volunteers of Mollham Volunteer Team from near the team office in Idlib, they are (Muhammad Noor Tahan and Suleiman Taleb), and confiscated a car of a one of the team members, and took them to an unknown destination, according to what Mollham Volunteer Team announced the same day.





Image showing the announcement of Mollham Volunteer Team for the abduction of two volunteers by HTS on February 28, 2018.

Photo credit: [Mollham Volunteer Team page](#)

On March 2, 2018, Mollham Volunteer Team issued a statement on its official page confirming that the volunteers were still abducted until that date, and demanding to reveal their fate.



### بيان

في استهداف جديد للناشطين السوريين والعاملين في مجال الإغاثة في الداخل السوري، قامت هيئة تحرير الشام بتاريخ 28/2/2018 م بخطف كل من: (مدير مكتب فريق ملهم التطوعي في مدينة إدلب المتطوع: محمد نور طحان ، والمدير المالي للمكتب المتطوع: سليمان طالب)

وتمت عملية الخطف أثناء قيام المتطوعين بجمع التبرعات لحملة الغوطة الشرقية، إذ تم اعتقالهما، ومصادرة التبرعات التي كانت بحوزتهما

وبناء عليه فإن فريق ملهم التطوعي يدين ما أقدمت عليه الهيئة، وينفي صحة كل ما وُجّه للمتطوعين من اتهامات، ويعلن تعليق عمل مكتبه في إدلب بكافة أقسامه حتى يتم الإفراج عن المتطوعين وإعادة ما تم مصادرته من التبرعات، ويحمل الجهة الخاطفة مسؤولية سلامتهما.

يُذكر أن الهيئة كانت قد اعتقلت منذ مدة متطوعين آخرين من فريق ملهم التطوعي لمدة تزيد عن شهرين وأطلقت سراحهما بعد ثبوت براءتهما!

خُرّر بتاريخ  
2018-3-2



Image of the statement issued by Mollham Volunteer Team on March 2, 2018.

Photo credit: [Mollham Volunteer Team page](#).

A member of Mollham Volunteer Team confirmed to STJ field researcher that the volunteer (Suleiman Taleb) had been released on March 3, 2018, while the volunteer (Mohamed Noor Miller) was released on March 8, 2018, after all false charges, which brought against them, were dropped.



### Third. Civil Protests Rejecting Fighting:

Days after the outbreak of military confrontations between HTS and SLF, many civilians protested against those clashes calling on the parties to spare civilians and public places from fighting. That was happened in many towns such as Babto in the western countryside of Aleppo and Maar Shoreen in the eastern Idlib countryside and the town of Mastomah in the southern countryside of Idlib, where the locals protested against the presence of military checkpoints of HTS in the vicinity of their towns and asked them to leave, until they succeeded in that.

[A video footage](#) published by (IDLIB PLUS), on February 26, 2018, showed people of Maar Shoreen in the eastern countryside of Idlib expelling HTS checkpoint, that was at the entrance of their city.





Image showing some of the demonstrations in the city of Ma'rрат Misirin in the northern countryside of Idlib on February 27, 2018.

Photo credit: [IDLIB PLUS](#)

According to the field researcher in Syrians for Truth and justice, an agreement was reached between the Liberation Front of Syria on the one hand and the Liberation of the Sham on the other, on 16 March 2017, in order to end the military confrontations and "fighting" between the parties, This agreement has resulted in the release of all detainees, the cessation of incitement and media harassment, as well as the cessation of mutual arrests and raids between the two parties.