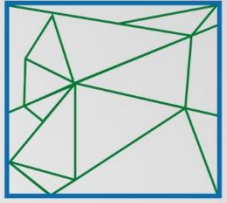


February 2019

سوريون
من أجل
الحقيقة
والعدالة
Syrians
For Truth
& Justice



In Sync with Russia-Turkey Talks in Sochi, Civilians Are Falling Dead

Between the 14th and the 25th of February 2019, the frequency of attacks increased, due to which several civilians, children and women included, were rendered dead in Syrian Regular forces/Russian shelling

In Sync with Russia-Turkey Talks in Sochi, Civilians Are Falling Dead

Between the 14th and the 25th of February 2019, the frequency of attacks increased, due to which several civilians, children and women included, were rendered dead in Syrian Regular forces/Russian shelling

Between February 13 and 25, 2019, several cities and towns in the northern and western rural parts of Hama witnessed an increase in the tempo of bombardment¹ and the return of aerial raids² by the Syrian regular forces and their Russian ally. These towns endured a daily shelling that rendered no less than 12 civilians dead, including children, while others were injured. In retaliation, armed opposition groups targeted areas held by the Syrian governmental forces, which also resulted in injuries, describing their attacks as “a response to the regular forces’ violation of the de-escalation deal.”

According to media reports, the shelling that targeted the area corresponded to the Russian-Turkish consultations, conducted in the Russian city of Sochi, which addressed the status of the areas held by Islamic brigades and armed opposition groups. Statements succeeded the talks highlighting Russia’s intention to undertake a military operation in Idlib against the al-Nusra Front, in cooperation with Turkey. Iran has also made statements about consultations concerning its stepping in into the operation.

I. Casualties of the Shelling of Areas in Northern Hama:

The field researcher of Syrians for Truth and Justice/STJ for northern rural Hama monitored several civilian casualties, who fell due to the missile and artillery shelling which targeted the majority of the area’s towns and villages from the 13th to the 25th of February 2019. The casualties were recorded as thus:

1. On February 25, 2019, the bloodiest day of all, a child died in the missile attack that hit the city of Kafr Zita; another child died due to the artillery shelling that targeted the village of Joubb Slaimane and a third, a little girl, died in the artillery shelling of the village of Zayzun; a woman fell dead due to the missiles that landed in the village Kafr Nabudah as well, while several injuries were recorded throughout these areas.
2. On the 24th of the same month, aircraft of the Syrian regular forces raided the agricultural lands in the surrounding of the Atshan village, targeting them with machineguns.

¹ The shelling attacks undertaken by the Syrian regular forces, the armed opposition groups and the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham/HTS are all considered a violation of the de-escalation deal and that of the demilitarized zone, concluded after the Astana Talks and the Sochi summit, under the auspice of Russia, Turkey and Iran in 2017 and 2018. The de-escalation deal provided for the establishment of Russian and Turkish observation posts as to police the ceasefire between the armed opposition factions and the Syrian government. These disengagement posts were spread in the control areas of both sides in western rural Aleppo and the surrounding of Idlib province, as far as northern rural Hama. For its part, the demilitarized zone’s deal provided for the removal of the heavy weapons of the Free Army and the rest of the armed groups from a 15-20km deep area. It is worth mentioning that HTS declared its refusal of the Astana deal, while it made no direct statements concerning the demilitarized zone’s deal.

² Local activists in northern rural Hama pointed out that the aerial raids were completely halted with the beginning of September 2018 to return on February 24, 2019.

Commenting on this, Mohammad Hwaish, a local activist, pointed out that **these raids are the first since five months, adding that similar raids have targeted the city of Kafr Zita the following day, however, neither injuries nor deaths were recorded.**

3. On the 22nd of the same month, the little girl Weam Marwan Elaisheh died due to the shelling that targeted the village of Zayzun. A woman and her child were also injured in the missile attack on the al-Hawash, while Sarah al-Hassan, her husband and child, died in the shelling of the al-Zakah village on the 21st day. Similarly, a civilian young man fell dead due to the mortar shells that targeted the al-Sharia village on the 20th day of the same month.

STJ spoke to the local activist Abdulmajid al-Omar, who said:

“On February 13, 2019, the regime’s forces attacked the village of al-Tuwayni with missiles, which caused the death of the little girl Yara Munther Janoud and her sister Hiba, who passed away affected by her wounds. The towns of the Qalaat al-Madiq, al-Sharia and the Hawija were targeted by artillery and missile shelling on the same day; however, no casualties were recorded there, while a man, Osman al-Shahoud, and his three children were injured in the artillery shelling of the village of al-Hwaiz.”

Al-Omar added:

“On February 15, 2019, two children and three young men, who all belong to the family of Ghanouj, were injured in the heavy artillery bombardment that targeted a residential neighborhood in the village of al-Sharia. In a similar attack, in addition to which rocket launchers were deployed, the towns of Hawija, al-Hwaiz, Bab al-Taqa, and Qalaat al-Madiq were targeted, but no casualties were recorded. On the 16th of the same month, a young man called Ahmad Qadour al-Hamwiyeh – a medical worker at the Free Hama Healthcare Directorate- fell dead in the Qalaat al-Madiq due to the shelling that targeted it, while no casualties were recorded in the attacks on the towns of Kafr Zita, al-Lataminah, al-Sayad, al-Arba'een, al-Janabrah, al-Jabriyeh, al-Hwaiz, Bab al-Taqa, al-Sakher, al-Jisat, Jisr Beit al-Ras, Latmin, al-Sharia and al-Buwaydah.”

On the 17th and 18th of February 2019, the towns of al-Lataminah, al-Zakah, al-Hwaiz, Bab al-Taqa, Qalaat al-Madiq, al-Jisat, Jisr Beit al-Ras, al-Tuwayni, Hawija, al-Sharia were targeted with artillery and mortar shells without any casualties, while a woman, Maab al-Zaidan, and her fetus died in the shelling that hit Qalaat al-Madiq on the 19th of the same month. The same towns endured an identical shelling; however, no casualties were recorded.

II. The Checkpoints Responsible for the Shelling and Their Affiliation:

According to the testimonies obtained by STJ, the Russian forces, stationed at the posts and military camps in the Tall Salba and Qubaybat Abu al-Huda have participated alongside the Syrian regular forces which shelled the above-mentioned areas from the 13th to the 19th of February 2019.

STJ's field researcher communicated with Hilal Shaheen, a worker at the Observatories/Observatory Twenty³, who located the posts from where the mortar shells and the missiles were launched. He said:

“On February 13, 2019, the 5th Legion under the Syrian regular forces, positioned in the village of Qabr Fidda deployed heavy artillery weapons to conduct shelling; these shells landed in the two villages of al-Hwaiz and al-Tuwayni. On the 15th of the same month, elements of the Syrian regular forces-affiliated 4th Division, stationed in the village of al-Karim, used mortar shells and heavy artillery arms, targeting the villages of al-Hwaiz, al-sharia, Qalaat al-Madiq and Bab al-Taqa. On day 16, Russian forces, positioned in the Tall Salba post, to the east of the al-Suqaylabiyah city, attacked the city of Qalaat al-Madiq with missiles. Here, it is important to mention that the Russian forces have brought in a rocket launcher and a canon to the named post on February 13, on which they also conducted several attacks against the city of Qalaat al-Madiq.”

He added:

“On February 17, the National Defense Militias, positioned in the city of al-Suqaylabiyah, led by Nabel al-Abdullah, bombarded Qalaat al-Madiq, al-Hwaiz, Shashabo Mountain, Bab al-Taqa, al-Sharia and al-Tuwayni, using mortar and rocket shells. Concerning the 18th and the 19th of February, the camps of the Syrian regular forces, positioned in Jurin, Braideej and al-Suqaylabiyah, along with the Russian forces, stationed in the Tall Salba and Qubaybat Abu al-Huda, where responsible for the six-hour extensive shelling that targeted the towns of Qalaat al-Madiq, Kafr Zita, al-Hwaiz, Bab al-Taqa, al-Tuwayni, and al-Sharia.”

³ The observatories monitor aircraft's traffic and land attacks. They consist of a massive network of observation rooms, spreading along the lines of contact between the Syrian regular forces and the armed opposition groups. There, workers use listening devices, thermal imaging and night vision binoculars and other equipment, through which they monitor movement at Syrian regular forces' posts and air bases.

III. Armed Opposition Groups Shell Syrian Government-held Areas:

Between February 15 and 25, 2019, several armed opposition groups announced targeting posts and areas affiliated with the Syrian regular forces, in addition to loyalist ones, describing attacks as “in response to the regime’s violation of the de-escalation deal.”

STJ’s field researcher spoke to a military commander, who refusing to reveal his name said:

“On February 15, 2019, the Jaysh al-Izza/ Army of Glory bombarded the towns of Asileh, Sahlab and Mahardah with artillery arms. On February 16, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham/HTS, Jaysh al-Nasr/Army of Victory and the Guardians of Religion Organization launched attacks on the cities of Sahlab, al-Suqaylabiyah, Masyaf, Mahardah, Suran and Jurin while we are sure of neither the attacks’ results nor if there are any casualties. On February 17, HTS, Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya, Jaysh al-Izza and Jaysh al-Nasr bombarded the cities of Sahlab, al-Suqaylabiyah, Masyaf, Mahardah, Shattha and Jurin, using Grad missiles and heavy artillery arms.”

On Facebook, pro-Syrian government media pages posted that no less than 13 persons, describing them as civilians, were injured due to the above-mentioned attacks.



A statement posted by the Jaysh al-Izza on its Twitter account concerning the attacks it launched on several pro-Syrian government posts.

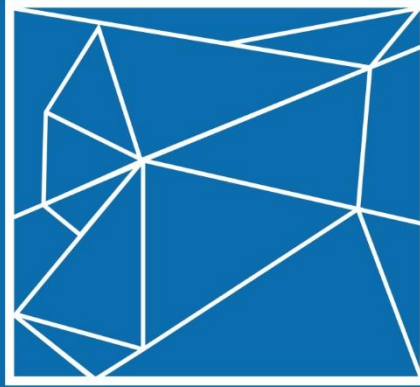
International humanitarian law, or the laws of war, which apply to the armed conflict in Syria, prohibit attacks that target civilians or civilian property, that do not or cannot discriminate between civilians and combatants, or that cause harm to civilians or civilian property that is disproportionate to any anticipated military gain. All parties to the conflict

have an obligation to take all feasible precautions to spare civilians from harm, and not to deploy forces in densely populated areas.⁴

Individuals, planners, commanders and executors, involved in direct attacks that target civilians or attacks that do not discriminate between civilians and combatants, or that cause harm to civilians that is disproportionate to any anticipated military gain area, with criminal intent, might be subjected to trial for war crimes, including the responsibility for leadership.

⁴ “Syria/Russia: Airstrikes, Siege Killing Civilians”, Human Rights Watch, December 22, 2017, last visit: March 3, 1, 2019. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/12/22/syria/russia-airstrikes-siege-killing-civilians>.

سوريون
من أجل
الحقيقة
والعدالة
Syrians
For Truth
& Justice



About Syrians for Truth and Justice:

STJ is an independent, nongovernmental organization whose members include Syrian human rights defenders, advocates and academics of different backgrounds and nationalities.

The initiative strives for SYRIA, where all Syrian citizens (females and males) have dignity, equality, justice and equal human rights.

🌐 www.stj-sy.com

📘 [syriaSTJ](https://www.facebook.com/syriaSTJ)

🐦 [@STJ_SYRIA_ENG](https://twitter.com/STJ_SYRIA_ENG)

📧 [Syrians for Truth & Justice](https://www.instagram.com/Syrians_for_Truth_and_Justice)

✉ editor@stj-sy.org