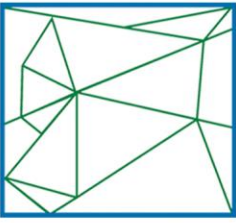


سوريون
من أجل
الحقيقة
والعدالة
Syrians
For Truth
& Justice



April 2018



Military Escalation during March- Idlib Province

Attacks on Educational Facilities in Idlib City and a Massacre in Kafr Sijnah, Idlib Countryside



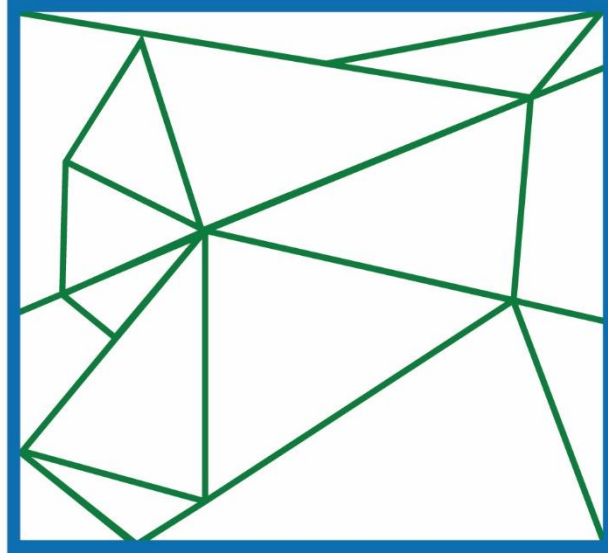
About Syrians for Truth and Justice/STJ

[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.

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Military Escalation during March- Idlib Province

Attacks on Educational Facilities in Idlib City and a Massacre in Kafr Sijnah, Idlib Countryside



Introduction

Syrian regular forces and their Russian allies launched violent attacks on several towns and cities in Idlib province during March 2018; they bombed educational and service facilities as well as civilian gatherings in several districts of the province, causing a number of civilian casualties.

On March 11, 2018, warplanes believed to be Russian carried out several airstrikes on [Idlib](#)¹ city, targeting the building of the Examination Service and the "SHINE" Institute for Information Technology along with the Central Bank building, causing significant material damage. No human damage recorded.

On March 10, 2018, the Syrian regular warplanes carried out several airstrikes on the town of [Kafr Sijnah](#)² located in Idlib; one strike hit a civilian's house in the town, killing eight people, the majority from the same family, as well as injuring scores of others.

According to the field researcher of [Syrians for Truth and Justice/STJ](#), the Syrian regular forces and their allies seek to hit the infrastructure throughout Idlib province, as well as to cripple the civil life and prevent civilians from settling down. The researcher noted that targeting the civilians' complexes, particularly in Kafr Sijnah, led many civilians to displace from their homes towards farms and orchards located on the outskirts of the town.

The attacks are part of the military campaign launched by the Syrian regular forces and their allies throughout cities and towns of Idlib province as of October 2017, which began with attempts to control villages and towns in the northern countryside of Hama³, and then other villages and towns

¹ Hayat Tahrir al-Sham-HTS/ formerly al-Nusra Front controls Idlib city.

² Syrian Liberation Front- SLF controls Kafr Sijnah.

³ This escalation comes from the Syrian regular forces, following the HTS control of the village of Abu Dali in the northeast countryside of Hama province on October 9, 2017. However, the Syrian regular forces, supported by warplanes affiliated to the Russian Air Force, were able to restore this village, as well as other villages in the northern countryside of Hama, on December 29, 2017. Furthermore, the Syrian regular forces and their allies could advance towards the southeast countryside of Idlib, and took control of several villages such as Atshan, Khwein and Sinjar, on January 7, 2018, with the aim of arriving at the "Abu Duhur" military airbase in the southeastern



in the eastern and southern countryside of Idlib. The campaign has left several massacres against civilians in addition to depriving them of medical services through targeting hospitals. Syrians for Truth and Justice-STJ, had earlier prepared a report entitled "[Attacking Medical Facilities in Rural Idlib Deprives Tens of Thousands Residents from Medical Services](#)", a Special Report Documenting the Targeting of "Sham Hospital in Has and the "Blood Bank" in Saraqib during February 2018. STJ also prepared a further report entitled "[Two Massacres in the Ma'arat Nu'man and Has Following Sochi Congress](#)" for National Dialogue", a report documenting dozens of casualties in warplanes shelling the residential neighbourhoods in Idlib southern countryside.

First: Targeting Educational Facilities in Idlib City

On March 11, 2018, warplanes believed to be Russian, launched six airstrikes on Idlib city, center of the province that contains the largest gatherings of civilians and displaced people. One strike hit the Central Bank building that the Salvation Government⁴, indirectly affiliated with HTS/formerly al-Nusra Front, had made it a headquarter for its ministries. Then warplanes carried out further raids on several educational establishments, including building of the Examination Service and SHINE Institute "for Information Technology within Idlib city. In this regard, Rania Kisar, the director of SHINE Institute spoke to STJ, and said:

"SHINE Institute was supposed to be opened in a few days to benefit a large number of male and female students, but the bombardment prevented us from completing it. At about 3:00 p.m., Russian warplanes targeted the Central Bank in Idlib city, and shortly afterwards, they went back and targeted the building of the Examination Service, so we evacuated SHINE Institute immediately. Only five minutes later, the warplanes re-targeted the building of the city's

countryside of Idlib. According to STJ's researchers, the military operations led the Syrian government forces and allied militias to control the airbase on January 27, 2018.

⁴ On September 17, 2017, the Syrian General Conference was held in Idlib province, and ended with the formation of a constituent council/constituent body to nominate a new head of government. In its final statement, it formed what they called the "Salvation Government" in order to regulate the liberated areas in the north of the war-torn country of Syria. Indeed, the "Salvation Government" was formed on November 2, 2017, as it announced the nomination of its ministers at its founding conference, which led by "Mohammed Sheikh", who said that the formation of this government came after an initiative to form a civil administration by a group of academics, events, and entities in Idlib province. The government has faced accusations of subordination to Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)/formerly al-Nusra Front because it utilized elements of HTS in implementing several decisions.



Commercial Institute, and caused its destruction dramatically, thankfully no casualties recorded because we had evacuated the place."



An image shows the extent of the destruction affected to SHINE Institute for Information Technology in Idlib city following its bombing on March 11, 2018.

Photo credit: STJ

[A video footage](#), posted by Rania Kisar, showed some of the devastation affected to the institute following the bombardment on March 11, 2018.



Mustafa El Haj, media director of the Directorate of Education⁵ in Idlib province, testified to STJ and said that building of the Examination Service was also raided by warplanes believed to be Russian on the same day. One of the rockets fell inside the three-storey department, followed by two other rockets exploded at the bottom of the building, specifically in one of the main warehouses of the Examination Service where they hold a large number of examination papers for the intermediate and secondary certificates. Consequently, significant material damage affected the warehouses, but no casualties recorded. The media director explained that this prompted the Directorate of Education in Idlib province to issue a statement on March 12, 2018, confirming the integrity of the identity papers for students' certificates and their papers in Idlib province.



Image of the statement issued by the Directorate of Education in Idlib province on March 12, 2018.

Photo credit: [Directorate of Education in Idlib province.](#)

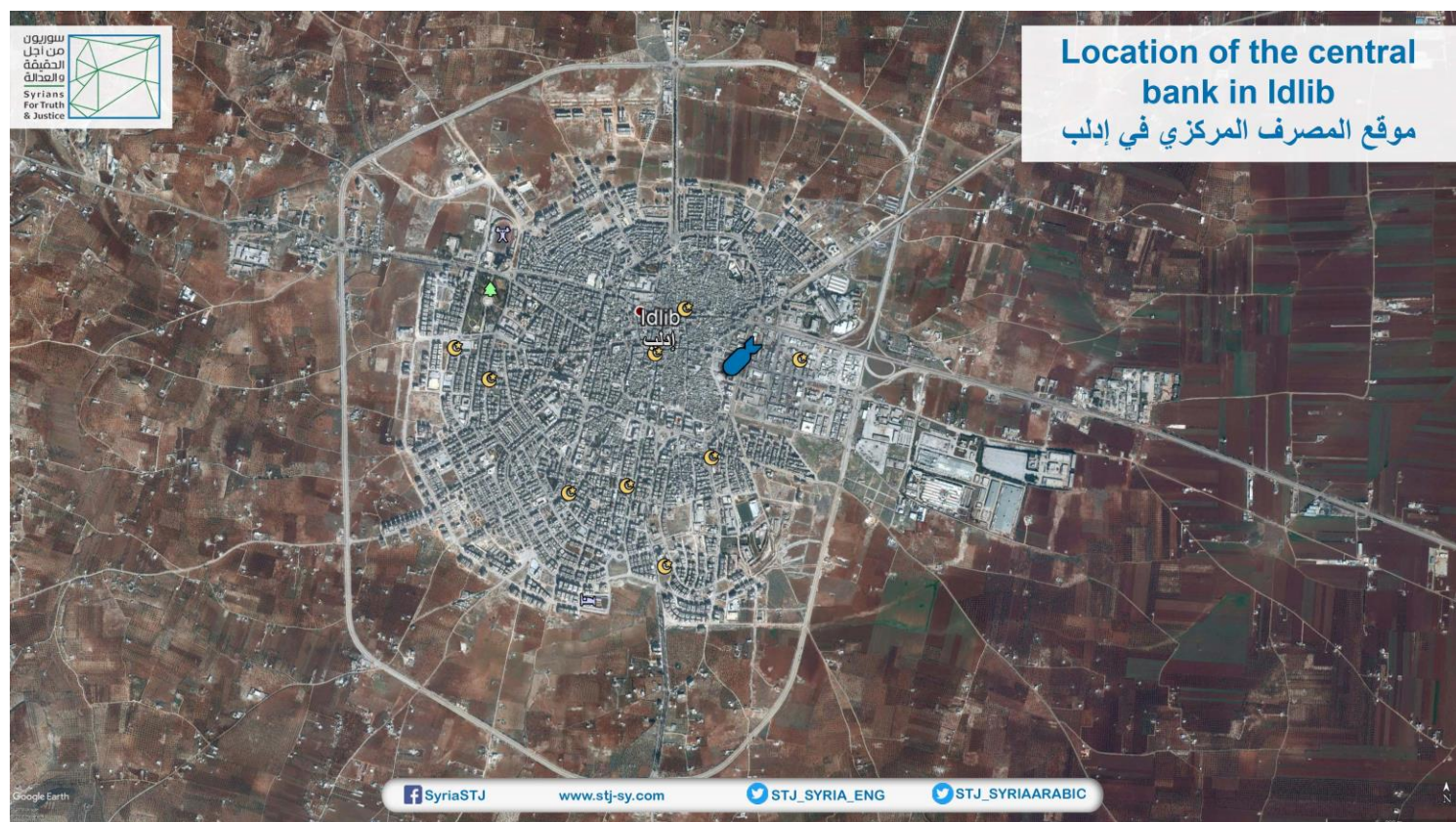
⁵ The Directorate of Education in Idlib follows the Syrian Interim Government/Syrian Opposition Coalition.

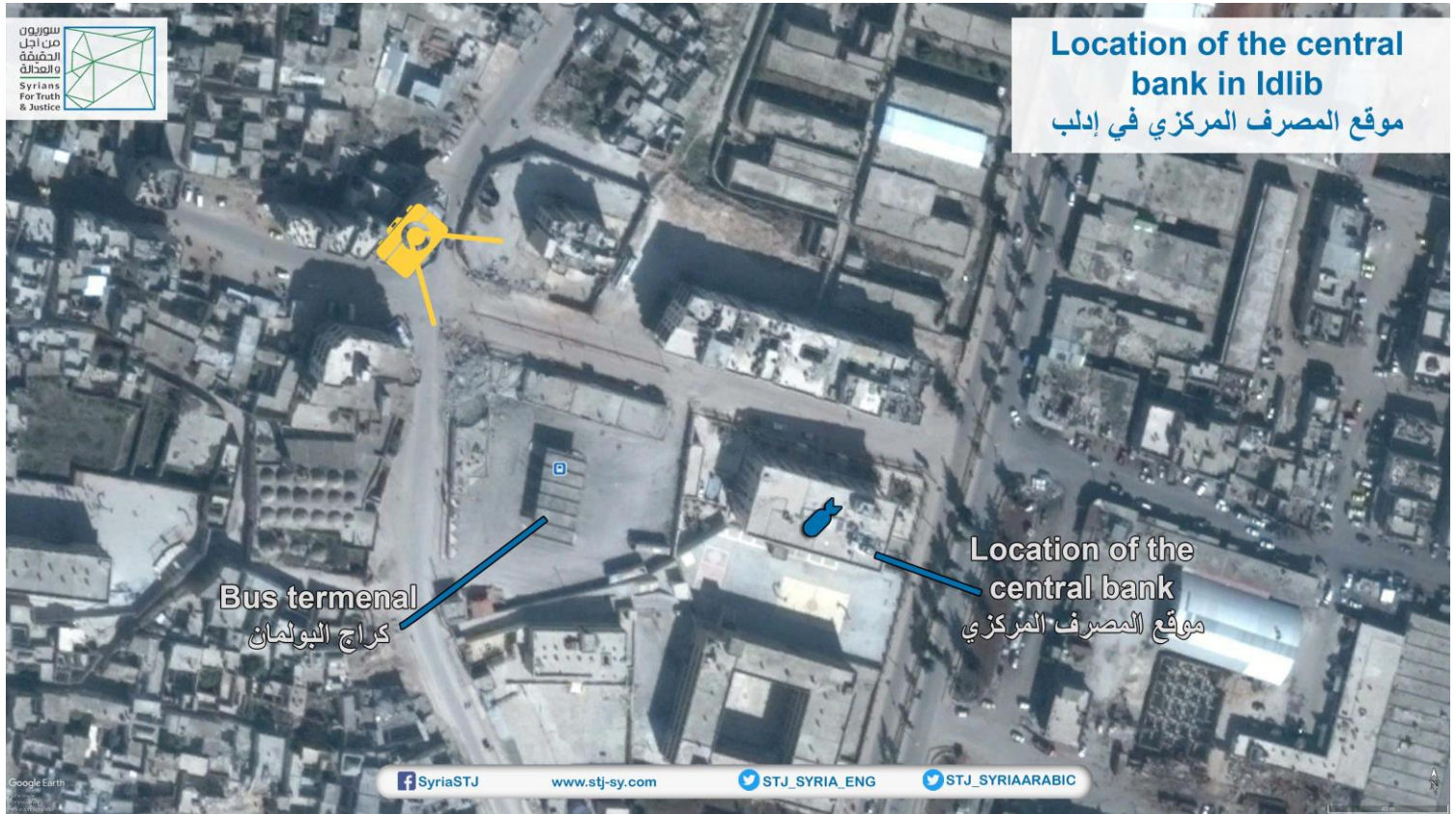
[A video footage](#) broadcasted by Step News Agency showed some of the damage to Idlib's building of the Examination Service, following its shelling on March 11, 2018.

According to the field researcher of STJ, scores of schools were closed on March 12, 2018, owing to the violent bombardment campaign that targeted Idlib city a day earlier, given the schools' children and teaching staff experienced panic and fear because of the series of the attacks that day.

According to several sources, bombardment of the Central Bank building, the Salvation Government considers as headquarter for its ministers, coincided with a meeting held inside the building. However, the first rocket landed on the building without exploding. Hence, the prime Minister of the Salvation Government decided to evacuate the place immediately, at that time, the warplanes returned and launched a new attack on the building, destroying it completely, but no casualties recorded.

[A video footage](#) posted by an activist showed the moment of targeting the Central Bank in Idlib city on March 11, 2018.







Analysis of visual evidence of targeting the Central Bank building in Idlib city.



Second: Warplanes Kill Seven Members from One Family in Kafr Sijnah

One-day prior to targeting the educational facilities in Idlib city, specifically on March 10, 2018, warplanes of the Syrian regular forces carried out several raids on Kafr Sijnah town located in Idlib countryside. They shelled civilians' gatherings and their homes in the village, killing eight civilians and injuring dozens. Only one day after this attack, the warplanes again shelled areas of civilian gatherings, which was confirmed by "Abderrazaq Sebeih", chairperson of the Local Council of the town Kafr Sijnah:

"At 3:30 p.m. on March 10, 2018, Syrian warplanes targeted one of the civilian's houses in the village, a house belongs to As-Saad Family, killed seven members along with a woman who was near the house, and injured others who then were transported to hospitals on the border with Turkey, given some of them were seriously injured. Being the chairperson of the Local Council, we appealed the people not to assemble in the market nor shops nor even at homes, because the Syrian regime's aircrafts always target the population gatherings, so that they could claim lives of as many victims as they can. The day after the attack, March 11, 2018, Syrian warplanes re-targeted the city with thermobaric (vacuum) rockets, killing four civilians identified as Shahoud Khalid Ighraa, Shahoud Tewfik Ighraa, Khloud Khaled Hallaq and Abdelkreem Bashir ar-Rajab, and injuring dozens others."

In another attestation by Mohammed al-Hajj Ahmed, who hails from Kafr Sijnah, he told STJ, that on March 10, 2018, a warplane (Sukhoi 22) had targeted the village with two raids, dropping high-explosive rockets, and added:

"One of the rockets fell on a house belonging to as-Saad Family, where several members of the family were visiting a sick relative, so, some of them were killed including two children and an old man. Following the repeated actions of the village's civilian gatherings, the village of Kafr Sijnah witnessed a massive exodus because of the two-day bombardment that they had sustained. The people went to farms and orchards located on the outskirts of the village, while some of them did not find any place to resort to, so they decided to stay in their homes waiting for their destiny."

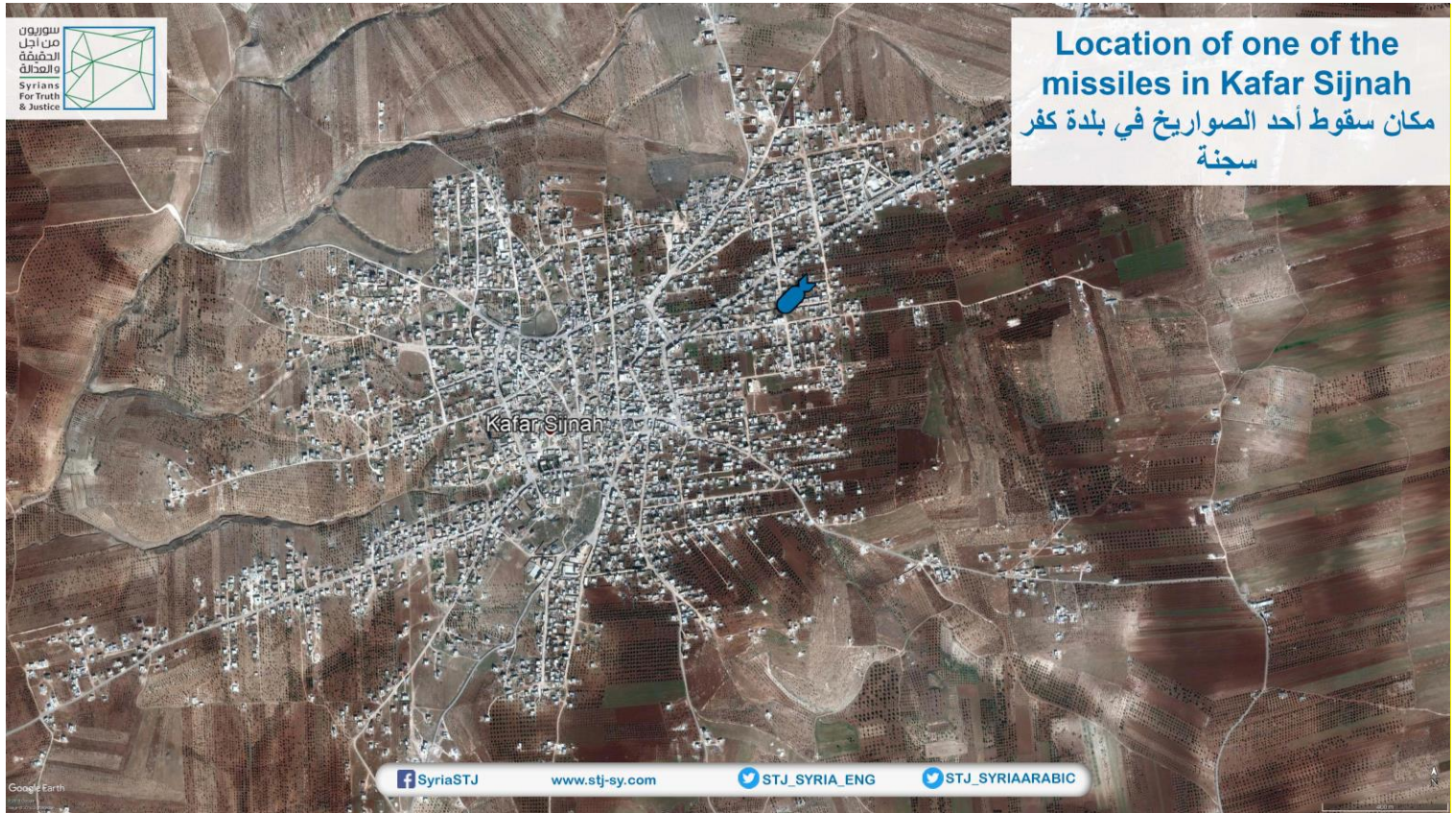


[A video footage](#) aired by an activist in Kafr Sijnah showed process of evacuation of the wounded and the dead after attacking a civilian's house of in the village, on March 10, 2018.



An image shows one of the strike locations near a civilian's house in Kafr Sijnah, on March 10, 2018.

Photo credit: STJ





Analysis of visual evidence of shelling a civilian's house in Kafr Sijnah.



Another image shows part of the devastation affected the village of Kafr Sijnah, Idlib countryside, following the aerial bombardment on March 11, 2018.

Photo credit: [The Local Council of Kafr Sijnah](#).

STJ's field researcher was able to document names of the civilian victims killed, following the aerial bombardment on Kafr Sijnah on March 10, 2018, they are:

1. Mohammed Mesbah as-Saad.
2. Sobhiya, daughter of Mohammed Mesbah as-Saad.
3. The child Musa'ab, son of Sham Mesbah as-Saad.
4. Sham, daughter of Mohammed Mesbah as-Saad.
5. Khalid Mesbah as-Saad.
6. The child Murad, son of Khalid as-Saad.
7. Wisal, the wife of Khalid Mesbah as-Saad.
8. Shamash ash-Shanteer, the wife of Hasan al-Mar'ei.