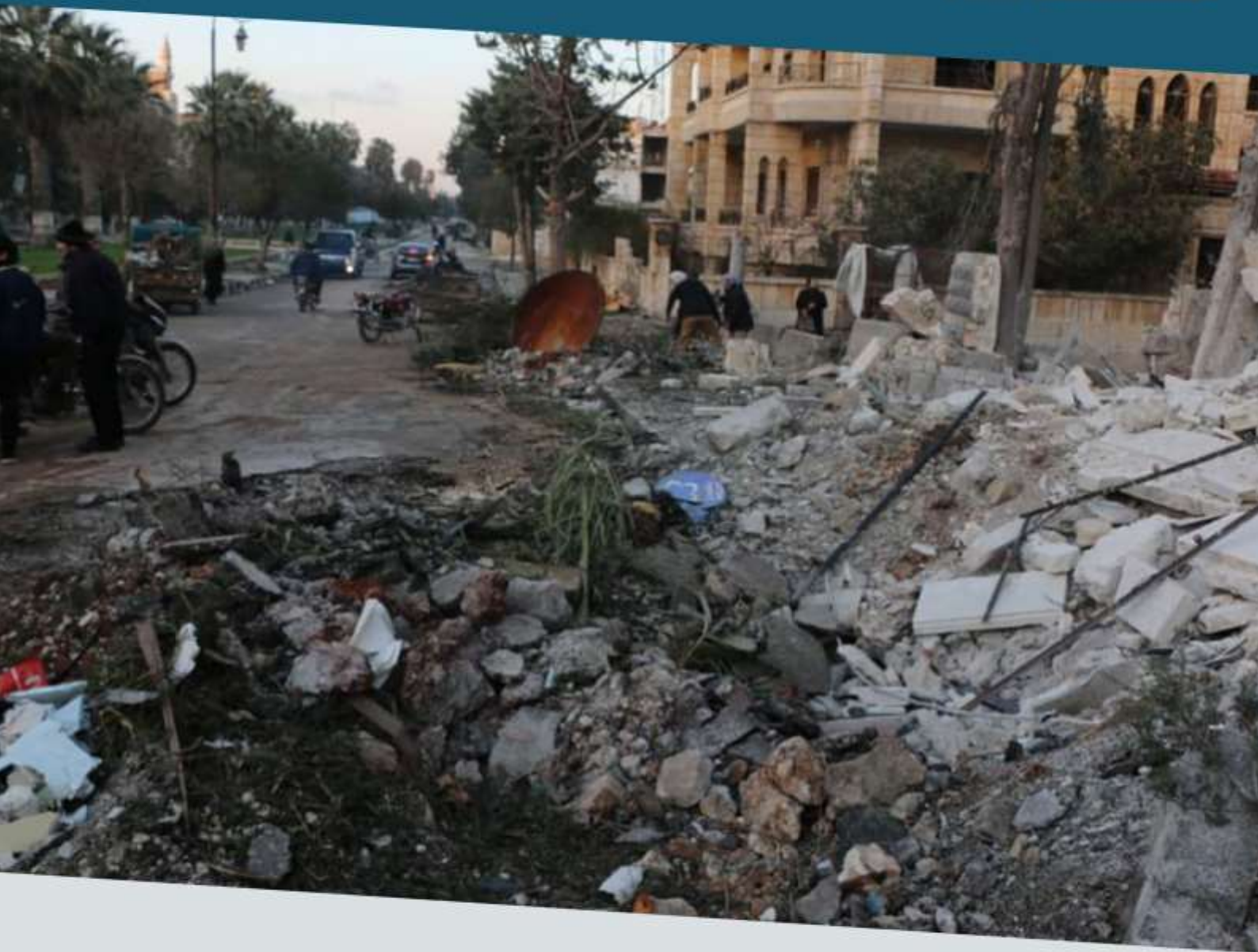


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سوريون
من أجل
الحقيقة
والعدالة
Syrians
For Truth
& Justice



Three Explosions in Idlib: One of Them Triggers Mass Execution

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On February 18, 2019, a double blast targeted a post of Uzbek militants; On March 1, 2019, a third was aimed at a restaurant owned by a militant of HTS

Between February 18 and March 2, 2019, the city of Idlib, which Hayat Tahrir al-Sham/HTS controls, bore witness to three explosions that made a target of military posts, and others vital, belonging to foreign militants, fighting for opposition armed groups. The blasts took a toll on many civilians, in addition to foreign fighters and their families, after which HTS mass executed several of its captives, saying that they belonged to the organization calling itself the Islamic State/IS/Daesh.¹

The field researchers of Syrians for Truth and Justice/STJ interviewed several eyewitnesses who gave an account of the blasts. The researchers have also visited the targeted locations and reported that military posts are stationed side by side to civil facilities in the area.

1. Two Sequential Blasts on al-Qusour Street:

On February 18, 2019, around 1:30 a.m., **the first blast** took place, a booby-trapped car blew up near a building in the al-Qusour Street. The building is a post for Uzbek militants, where they live accompanied by several of their families. In the same building, there is a gun shop and an office of the Glimpse of Hope Organization, which provides women-specific awareness and social services.

The second blast, however, took place about 7 to 10 minutes after the first, on the opposing side of the first blast's location; it was another car bomb. According to the testimonies obtained by STJ, the two blasts have resulted in the death of 16 civilians and the injury of many others, stressing that the total number of fatalities is way beyond that, for the majority of the dead are foreign fighters, their wives and children, whose specific number was not documented by the entities that hospitalized them.

Refusing to say his name for security concerns, an eyewitness, who was there during the two explosions, noted that the two blasts targeted a meeting held by high-ranking officers, of the second-tier of HTS and Uzbek militants. While initial information indicates that the Syrian Government, in cooperation with Daesh, is responsible for the explosions, the witness added that a leader died and two others are critically injured.

Another eyewitness, a woman, narrated to STJ's field researcher the following:

"We have just left the Glimpse of Hope Center, where we attended a training workshop, and it was only a short distance that we passed towards the opposite side of the street when the first car exploded behind us. Abu Bilial, a concierge, was there, and three female friends were following our suit; we knew nothing about their fate. We sped up to flee the street to hear a second explosion about ten minutes later."

¹ Daesh is the Arabic acronym for the Islamic State/IS.

- Analysis of Evidence and Facilities on al-Qusour Street:





The patching of a pothole caused by the first car bomb in al-Qusour Street, Idlib city. Taken on: February 18, 2019. Photo credit: STJ.

STJ's field researcher reported that the al-Qusour Street contains offices of the following civil society organizations: **Rakeen for Orphans Care Organization, Homs IDPs Department, Glimpse of Hope Center, Private Civil al-Fath School /al-Fateh al-Ahliyah al-Khasah, One Nation for Orphans/Umah Wahidah School, Narenj Tree Foundation and Care Center for Persons with Hearing and Speech Impairments**, in addition to the building, near which the explosion took place, that incubates a gun shop, the first post of Uzbek fighters and the former Idlib Province Swimming Pool, which became the Uzbek militant's second military post. It is worth mentioning that al-Qusour street is considered the concentration place for the majority of Uzbek militants.

- **The Tow Blasts' Casualties and Testimonies of Eyewitnesses:**

The Idlib Healthcare Directorate, affiliated with the former Syrian Interim Government, document the names of 13 dead civilians, in addition to two bodies of unidentified persons, who all met their fate in the two explosions. The directorate has also documented the names of 37 injured civilians, who have been rushed to Idlib Hospital. The dead are: Abdullah al-

A'abad, Mahmoud al-A'abad, Said Issati, Baker Mohammad al-Assa'ad, Tariq Jbarah, Mohammad Sharhan, Mohammad Abdulfatah Samie, Ali al-Bash, a young man belonging to Zaidani family, Bashar Qadour, Ahmad Haj Mohammad, Ali Zalfou and Shuhadeh Ma'atouq.

For his part, Mustafa Haj Yousef, a Syrian Civil Defense/White Helmets' volunteer, told STJ's field researcher the following:

"The number of the dead persons, document by the Healthcare Directorate, amounted to 16 civilians, in addition to more than 85 wounded persons, not to mention the massive destruction that befell residential buildings and civilians' cars. Four White Helmets' volunteers were also wounded, one of them has a critical injury."

Two eyewitnesses said that the second explosion happened 7 to ten minutes following the first after the people started to assembly to hospitalize the injured of the first explosion. The number of people on the street increased, doubling, thus, the number of civilian casualties.

2. Blast at Fusion Restaurant and Executions:

On March 1, 2019, a suicide bomber, an unidentified man, blew himself up with an explosive belt, after he fired a few shots from a rifle inside Fusion Restaurant, al-Dbait Neighborhood, the ownership of which belongs to an HTS militant called Shaquille, a British national. The explosion rendered seven persons dead and more than ten others injured, according to media reports.

M. H., an eyewitness who was near the blast's location, told STJ's field researcher the following:

"The street life was following its normal pace. We heard the sound of an explosion. I headed there. The restaurant was fully destroyed, inside which I saw the dead bodies of several foreign militants. I identified one of them because he used to frequent the Family Club in the city. I also saw the bodies of two civilians. The site strove with HTS militants."

- **The Executions:**

The day after the explosion, HTS put ten persons to death by a firing squad in front of Fusion Restaurant, saying that they belong to Daesh, whom it held captive with 150 others during the battles it fought in al-Khwain earlier on.

At a previous date, January 20, 2019 to be more specific, HTS also put to death 12 persons on similar charges, after an explosion by an undefined side targeted one of its posts on the northern outskirts of Idlib city.







The executions carried out by HTS against the background of Fusion Restaurant's explosion in Idlib city.

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History

Syrians for Truth and Justice was conceived during the participation of its co-founder in the Middle-East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) Leaders for Democracy Fellowship program, who was driven by a will to contribute to Syria's future. Starting as a humble project to tell the stories of Syrians experiencing enforced disappearances and torture, it grew into an established organisation committed to unveiling human rights violations of all sorts.

Convinced that the diversity that has historically defined Syria is a wealth, our team of researchers and volunteers works with dedication at uncovering human rights violations committed in Syria, in order to promote inclusiveness and ensure that all Syrians are represented, and their rights fulfilled.

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✉ editor@stj-sy.org