

August 2019



***Syria: Joint Syrian-Russian
Aerial Attacks Render Dozens
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*The attacks were carried out on July 22, 2019, hitting a popular
market ever crowded with civilians*

Introduction:

On July 22, 2019, no less than 50 persons died and more than 60 others got wounded in the violent air attacks that aimed at different parts of Idlib province. On the morning of the reported day, the city of Ma`arat al-Nu`man bore witness to a frenzied aerial attack, which hit its popular market. According to the testimonies obtained by Syrians for Truth and Justice/STJ, warplanes, believed to be Russian, took off from the Khmeimim Air Base, Latakia province, and raided the market, known for striving with civilians. The aircraft struck the market with a double raid, leaving no less than 40 persons, children and women included, dead and rendering more than 60 others injured. On the heels of the massacre, eyewitnesses reported, military aircraft, affiliated with the Syrian Air Forces, took turns in shelling various areas of the city, causing substantial material damage and boosting the number of persons injured.

The airstrike on Ma`arat al-Nu`man corresponded to another aerial offensive against the city of Saraqib at noon, on the same day, where the Syrian Air Forces-affiliated warplanes attacked the highway leading to the al-Hal Market, one of Saraqib city's popular markets. MiG-23 fighter aircraft, according to testimonies collected by STJ, took off from the Hama Military Air Base and raided the city, putting to death no less than eight persons, four of whom are children, not to mention the massive material damage afflicted upon the area.

According to STJ's field researcher, warplanes, affiliated with the Syrian Air Forces and others, believed to be Russian, took turns to bombard different areas in Idlib province on July 22, 2019 – the town of Kafar Roma, Maarzita, Bidama and Khan Shaykhun among others, rendering several civilians injured.

The attacks on Idlib province escalated in advance of the 13th round of the Astana Talks on Syria, to take place in the capital city of Kazakhstan Nur-Sultan on the 1st and 2nd of August 2019 and to focus on the latest developments in Syria, particularly in Idlib province and north-eastern Syria. The round is also to witness the participation of Lebanese and Iraqi delegations for the first time¹.

The Syrian regular forces and their Russian allies have been carrying out a brutal aerial campaign against areas in Idlib and Hama provinces since April 27, 2019, killing and injuring hundreds of civilians while displacing others in thousands, not to mention the massive destruction suffered by the infrastructure, hospitals and schools especially. The Syrian regular forces and their allies launched this campaign to control sites and villages in northern rural Hama and southern and western rural Idlib, where they managed to take over key posts, on

¹ "Astana Talks on 1st and 2nd of August: Lebanon and Iraq Participate for First Time," Russia Today. July 19, 2019. Last visited: August 10, 2019. https://arabic.rt.com/middle_east/1033134-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%AE%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%AB%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A3%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A7-%D9%81%D9%8A-1-%D9%882-%D8%A3%D8%BA%D8%B3%D8%B7%D8%B3-%D8%A8%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82-%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%88%D9%84-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A9/.

top of which were Qalaat al-Madiq and Kafr Nabudah town, northern Hama. Represented by the National Front for liberation/NFL, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham/HTS and others, the opposition armed groups, for their part, intermittently attacked posts-affiliated with the Syrian regular forces in northern rural Hama, leading to the latter's control of the Tal Meleh town and the al-Jubbayn village.

In a previous report by STJ, three medical facilities and eight schools were documented as being out of service in Idlib province, in addition to the complete or partial damage that befell 11 places of worship/mosques due to the latest camping, initiated by the Syrian regular forces and their Russian allies against Idlib province.²

In another report, STJ documented the targeting of four major cities in Idlib province, which bore witness to synchronized air raids on July 12, 2019, that aimed at residential areas, leaving 15 civilians dead, mostly women and children, and many others injured.³

On July 30, 2019, Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, condemned the inaction on the part of the members of the Security Council in response to the nonstop carnage in Idlib, where "the bombing and shelling in Syria for more than 90 days by the Government and Russia have led to carnage in the so-called de-escalation zone," according to Lowcock. On 26 July, 2019, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) identified at least 450 civilians who have been killed since late April – including more than a hundred in the last two weeks alone. It also reported the injury of hundreds of civilians in explosions and the displacement of more than 440 thousand persons.⁴

1. Ghastly Massacre Effected by an Attack on a Popular Market in Ma'arat al-Nu'man City:

On July 22, 2019, at 8:43 a.m. warplanes, believed to be Russian, launched a dual airstrike on a popular market in the city of Ma'arat al-Nu'man⁵, bombing it with four missiles. The airstrike resulted in the death and injury of dozens of civilians, according to the many testimonies obtained by STJ.

² "Idlib: Constant Bombardment Destructs Vital Facilities and Leaves Dozen Dead," STJ, June 25, 2019. Last visited: August 10, 2019. <https://stj-sy.org/en/idlib-constant-bombardment-destructs-vital-facilities-and-leaves-dozen-dead/>.

³ "Syria: 27 Persons Killed in Air Raids on Five Cities in Idlib," STJ, July 20, 2019. Last visited: August 10, 2019. <https://stj-sy.org/en/syria-27-persons-killed-in-air-raids-on-five-cities-in-idlib/>.

⁴ "'Do something'; UN relief chief urges Security Council action to stop the Syrian carnage unfolding 'in front of your eyes'," UN News. July 30, 2019. Last visited August 10, 2019. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/07/1043471>.

⁵ The city of Ma'arat al-Nu'man is militarily controlled by the National Front for Liberation/NFL and by the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham/HTS administratively through its affiliated Salvation Government.

Mouath al-Abbass, one of the civilians who were near the attack's area, narrated to STJ what happened. He said:

"On the morning of that day, while asleep, the sound of a massive explosion could be heard; it shook the place. I immediately could hear the Warplane Observatory as well, warning against a Russian aircraft, Sukhoi Su-34, which raided the vegetable market in the city, that is ever crowded with civilians. I hurried to the targeted place. On the way, I could hear the Observatory on the walky-talky that the Russian warplane will hit the same market a second time. The aircraft struck again. When I arrived there, the destruction was beyond comprehension; buildings and shops were made into rubble. Worse! The dead people's remains were everywhere around the place. I also saw a big hole – more than 3 meters deep, with a diameter around of 20 meters. A five-store-residential building completely collapsed, affected by the severe explosion. The Civil Defense was there in no time; it recovered dead bodies and injured people. It took the Civil Defense two days to recover the bodies of the dead people only. The attack left 42 people dead and more than 42 others injured, the majority of whom were children and women. Some of the dead were members of families displaced from other areas in Idlib province."



The hole that witness Mouath al-Abbass referred to above, created by the aerial shelling of Ma'arat al-Nu'man city. Taken on: July 22, 2019. Photo credit: STJ.

Al-Abbass reported that the attack's location lacked all forms of military targets, and it was a mere popular market, where dozens of shops congregate that provide civilians with their daily needs. He also said that a school, called "al-Kurdi School," is located less than 100 meters from the attack's location, in addition to a bakery; both suffered material damage.

Ahmad Jarban, a media activist from the city of Ma'arat al-Nu'man, told STJ that the warplanes attacked the popular market for a second time, once the city's residents and the Civil Defense volunteers gathered to search for the dead and injured in the aftermath of the first airstrike. He said:

"The second raid took a toll on several civilians, causing the death and injury of many. Volunteers of the Civil Defense also met their fate in the airstrike, not to mention the massive destruction it caused, for two neighborhoods were severely destroyed. About 45 minutes from the raid, another aircraft invaded the al-Ma'ara's airspace and raided its east-northern neighborhood, near the al-Salam/Peace Hospital. Another aircraft followed in its suit and dropped four missiles, one of which was loaded by cluster bombs. It hit the western neighborhood of the Ma'arat al-Nu'man city. One of the missiles landed near a school; another ended near my house. Praised by Allah, it did not explode! The third missile dropped at the center of the city, hitting a civil car. The fourth, nonetheless, landed in the famous street of al-Korniche, close to the Women Center and the office of the Syrian Women Assembly."

Ahmad added that the air raids suffered by Ma'arat al-Nu'man city synced with other attacks that hit various areas in Idlib province, such as the towns of Saraqib and Kafar Roma, causing a rise in the number of wounded civilians.

On the same note, a staffer working in the field of rescue, told STJ that they headed to the attack's location, which was a popular market in the city of Ma'arat al-Nu'man. They were taken aback, for the massive numbers of injured and dead civilians necessitated that they summon all the medical rescue teams operating in the area. He pointed out that many of the injured suffered severe wounds and were rushed to hospitals in border areas, such as Bab al-Hawa and Darkush, especially since the city's medical centers were striving with large numbers of dead and wounded people. This massacre registered the death of more than 42 persons and the injury of more than 60 others, including women and children.

For his part, one of the supervisors of the Warplane Observatories in Idlib province, said that the aircraft that committed the massacre was a Sukhoi Su-34 that took off from the [Khmeimim Air Base](#), Latakia province, at 8:03 a.m. It traced its way through the east-southern axis, arriving in east-southern rural Hama, from where it followed the northern axis, heading to the Ma'arat al-Nu'man city. It entered the city's airspace around 8:40 a.m., attacking it with a dual raid. Another warplane, Sukhoi Su-22, left the [al-Tiyas Military Airbase, also known as the T-4 Airbase](#), Homs province, around 9:00 a.m., tracing its way through the northern axis and arriving in the Ma'arat al-Nu'man city's airspace around 9:13 a.m. It targeted the city with four consecutive raids. In sync, another warplane took off from the al-Tiyas Military

Airbase around 9:10 a.m., entering the Ma`arat al-Nu`man city's airspace around 9:32 a.m. It hit the city with three raids, some of the missiles were loaded with cluster bombs. He added that the same warplane targeted the Kafar Roma town with cluster bomb-loaded missiles.



A dimension of the destruction that befell Ma`arat al-Nu`man city due to the aerial bombardment it suffered. Taken on: July 22, 2019. Photo credit: STJ.

On July 22, 2019, the Syria Civil Defense published a statement, accentuating that more than 31 persons died and 50 persons were injured on July 22, 2019, due to the Russian aerial bombardment of the Ma'arat al-Nu'man city, holding Russia the principle side responsible for these people's death.



The Syria Civil Defense's statement on the Ma'arat al-Nu'man city's massacre on July 22, 2019.

Photo credit: [Idlib-Syria Civil Defense's Facebook page](#).

In a statement on July 22, 2019, the Russian Ministry of Defense denied carrying out airstrikes against a popular market in the city of Ma'arat al-Nu'man, saying that: "The allegations of anonymous actors of the UK and U.S.-funded White Helmets that Russian Space Forces have conducted an airstrike against a market in Ma'arat al-Nu'man town is none but a fake news."

"Russia's Space Forces did not carry out any missions in the given region of the Syrian Arab Republic," the ministry added in the statement⁶.

⁶ "Russian Ministry of Defense Denies Carrying Out Airstrikes against a Market in Idlib," Russia Today. July 22, 2019. Last visited: August: 10, 2019. https://arabic.rt.com/russia/1033732-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D9%86%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%AC%D9%8A%D9%87-%D8%A3%D9%8A-%D8%B6%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%B3%D9%88%D9%82-%D8%B4%D8%B9%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A5%D8%AF%D9%84%D8%A8/?fbclid=IwAR18x2MpFKAkMc3xcOTidBALXCx9mQ-52HrNh03K_S0Hk2QzubZulK2JseE.

STJ's field researcher managed to document the names of the civilians who died in an airstrike on a popular market in the city of Ma'arat al-Nu'man, a number of whom are women and children:

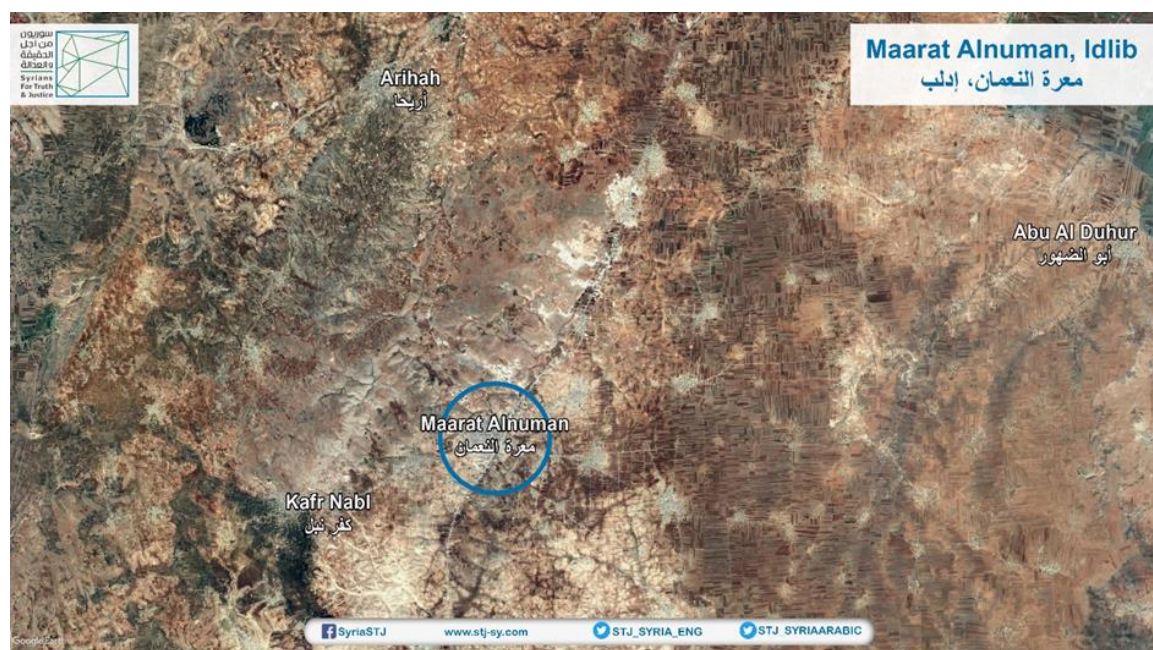
1. Little girl Rahaf Saher Khamourah from Ma'arat al-Nu'man.
2. Little girl Rawan Saher Khamourah from Ma'arat al-Nu'man.
3. Little boy Abdulkareem Saher Khamourah from Ma'arat al-Nu'man.
4. Shaher Khamourah's little daughter from Ma'arat al-Nu'man.
5. Little girl Hayat Khamourah from Ma'arat al-Nu'man.
6. Mahmoud Youssef Qeetaz from Ma'arat al-Nu'man.
7. Hayan al-Uqdeh from Hama province.
8. Alaa al-Khalid from Ma'arat al-Nu'man.
9. Yassin Moustafa Ramdan from Ma'arat al-Nu'man.
10. Hussam al-Nahtan from Ma'arat al-Nu'man.
11. Ferass al-Obaid from Jarjanaz.
12. Hamdou Mustafa al-Sdair from Ma'arat al-Nu'man.
13. Lama Tanari from Ma'arat al-Nu'man.
14. Shaher Khamourah from Ma'arat al-Nu'man.
15. Muwafaq Aukashah from eastern Ghouta.
16. Ayman al-Tujainee from Ma'arat al-Nu'man.
17. Farooq al-Harbi from eastern Ghouta.
18. Fawzi Jamal Ghareeb from Ma'arat al-Nu'man.
19. Mustafa Abed al-Ramdan from Ma'arat al-Nu'man.
20. Ahmad Ghareeb from Ma'arat al-Nu'man.
21. Wael al-Adel from Ma'arat al-Nu'man.
22. Assaf Sattam Khattab from Ma'arat al-Nu'man.
23. Wasfiah Ahmad al-Yateem from Ma'arat al-Nu'man.
24. Hinad al-Awad from Ma'arat al-Nu'man.
25. Marwan Abdulqader Sha'arawi from Ma'arat al-Nu'man.
26. Abdulhadi Adnan Alwan from Ma'arat al-Nu'man.
27. Mohammad Mahmoud al-Sdair from Ma'arat al-Nu'man.
28. Na'em Aboud Sourani from Ma'arat al-Nu'man.
29. Muhanad Hafyan from Ma'arat al-Nu'man.
30. Wasel Idriss from Ma'arat al-Nu'man.
31. Imad Nahtan from Ma'arat al-Nu'man.
32. Mahmoud Taha al-Adel from Ma'arat al-Nu'man.
33. Mohammad Abdulraziq Obaid from Ma'arat al-Nu'man.
34. Khalid Ahmad al-Taha from Ma'arat al-Nu'man.
35. Inass Mubarak, Wael al-Adel's wife, from Ma'arat al-Nu'man.
36. Taym Wael al-Adel from Ma'arat al-Nu'man.
37. Hamdan Mustafa al-Nu'ous from Ma'arat al-Nu'man.
38. Abu Zaid al-Hamwi from Hama province.
39. Rawa al-Haboh from Ma'arat al-Nu'man.

40. Adibeh Khamourah from Ma'arat al-Nu'man.
41. Hayat Khamourah al-Omar from Ma'arat al-Nu'man.
42. Walid Mustafa Taybeh from Ma'arat al-Nu'man.
43. Ameer al-Bunee, Civil Defense volunteer.

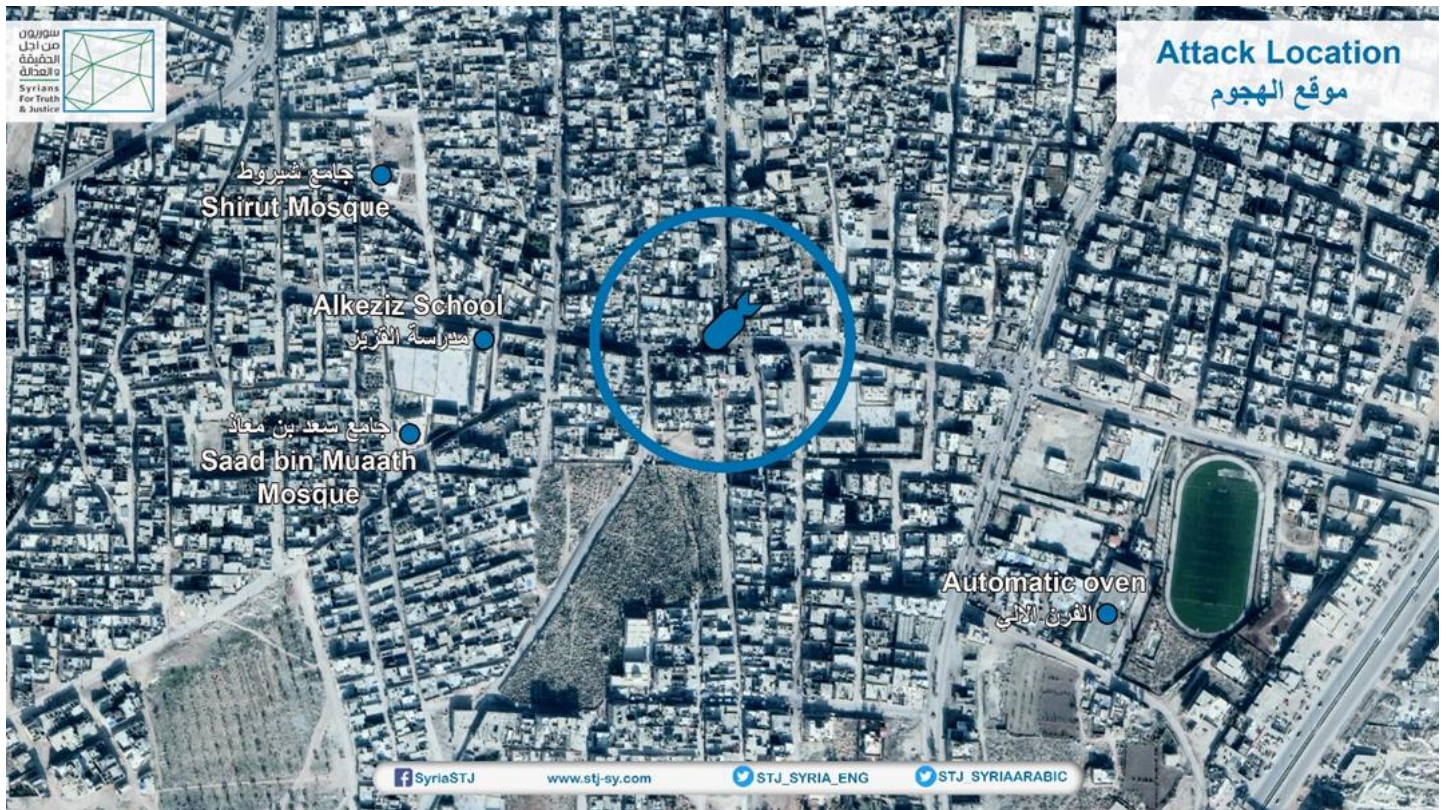
A [video](#), produced by STJ, shed a light on the destruction that befell the popular market in Ma'arat al-Nu'man city due to the shelling it suffered on July 22, 2019.

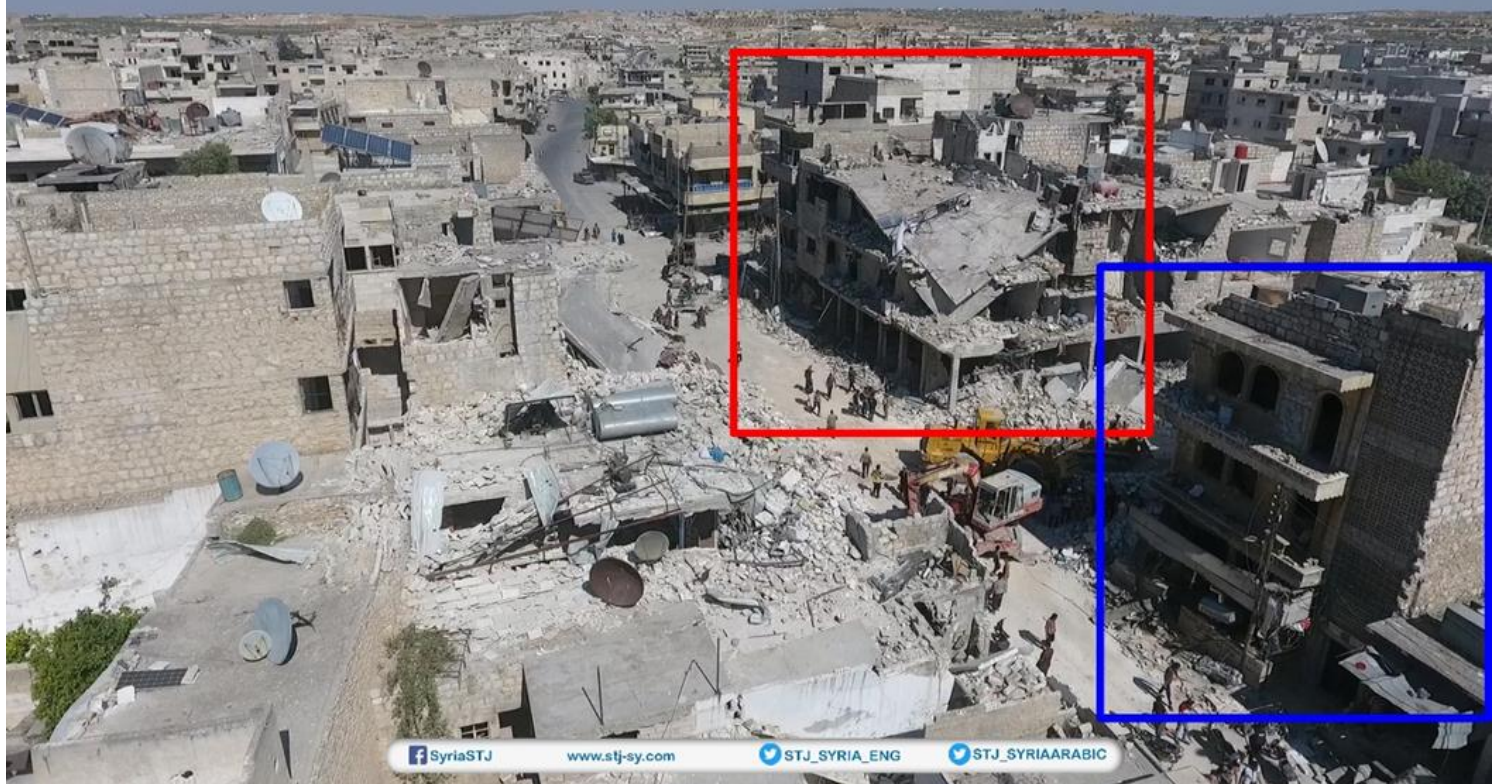
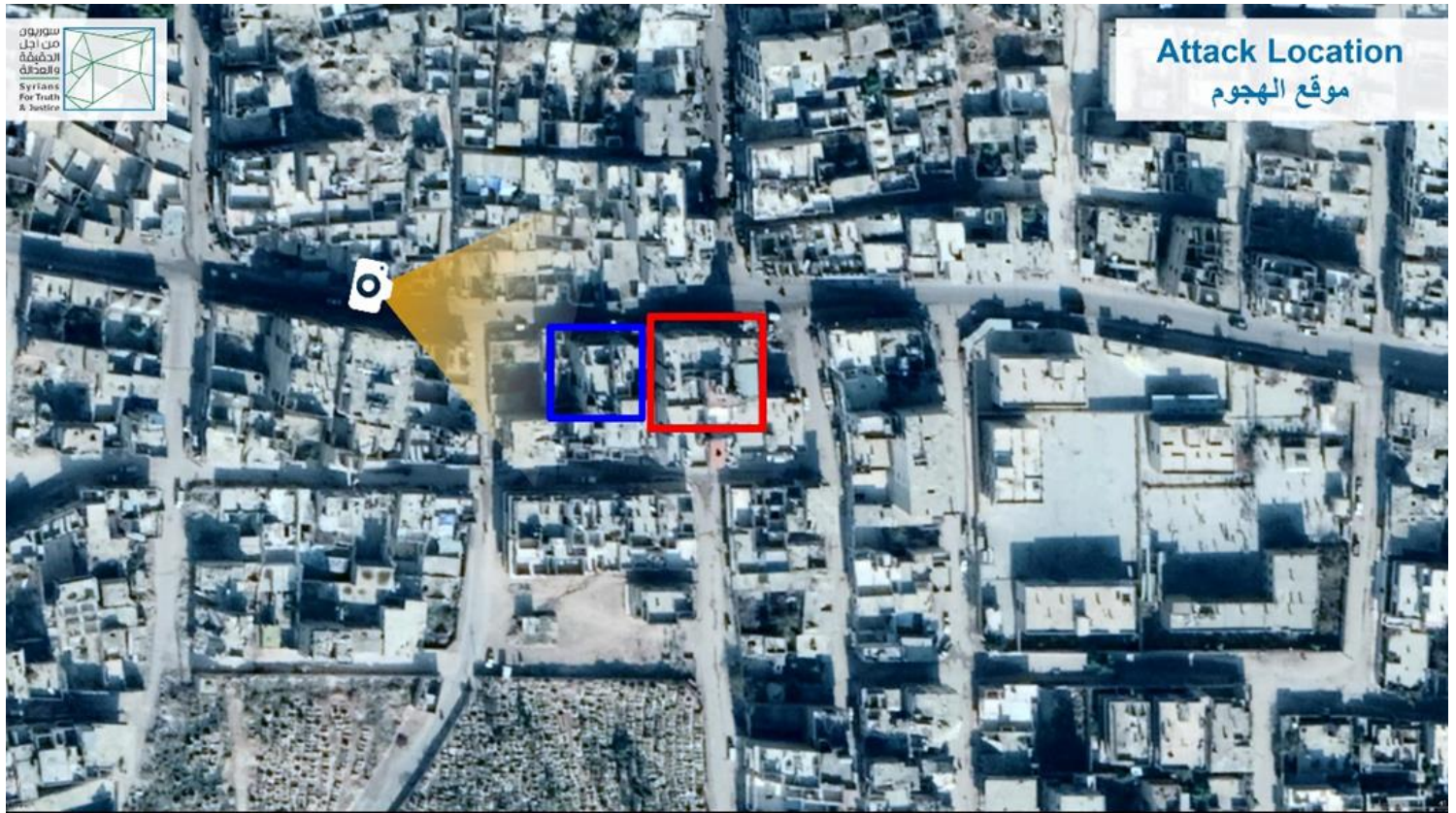


Footage taken from the video mentioned above, showing the destruction caused by the bombardment of Ma'arat al-Nu'man city on July 22, 2019.



Analysis of visual evidence:





2. Children in Saraqib City Rendered Dead by Airstrikes:

The air raids which the city of Ma'arat al-Nu'man bore witness to correspond to an attack against the city of Saraqib. On July 22, 2019, around 4:07 p.m., Syrian warplanes embarked on an attack, hitting the main street leading to one of the popular markets in the city of Saraqib⁷. According to eyewitnesses, the warplanes dropped two thermobaric missiles, rendering eight persons dead, including four children, and many others injured.

Obaida al-Ahmad, a resident of Saraqib city who was near the attack's location, recounted to STJ what happened on that day:

"It was noon, and I was at home when I heard the warplane observatories warning against an aircraft that took off from the Hama Air Base, which drew close to Ma'saran town and continued towards Saraqib town. The siren, accordingly, went on in the city of Saraqib. My family and I hid in a safe place; we could hear it roaring; it was drawing closer and closer. Only a few seconds passed, and it threw its load down. I ran onto the street and saw smoke pillars rising above various areas of the city's eastern part, particularly the main street leading to the al-Hal/Popular Market, where many shops are located. I headed to the attack's location. The sight was dreadful, for the fire was consuming the shops and people could be heard shouting for help around every corner. The Civil Defense volunteers recovered the bodies of the dead, shredded into pieces by the extremely explosive missiles. I bore witness to the recovery of a little boy, on whose small body debris fell, leaving the fire feed upon him."

Layith al-Abdallah, Director of the Civil Defense Center in Saraqib city, informed STJ that the warplane that attacked the city of Saraqib dropped two thermobaric missiles. The first landed in the vital main street in the city, hitting several shops in the industrial area – six shops were completely destroyed and other neighboring ones suffered partial damage. The second missile, however, ended between a civilian house and a girls' high school on the city's main street, destroying part of the house and another of the school's building, not to mention the damage that befell the nearby shops. The attack also caused the death of eight persons, four of whom are children, and the injury of four others.

A supervisor of a Warplane Observatory in Idlib province, reported to STJ that the aircraft that initiated the raid on Saraqib city was a MiG-23. It left the [Hama Air Base](#) at 4:00 p.m., heading east, where it hovered above Abu al-Duhur town, and then it headed west, entering Saraqib city's airspace and initiated the attack at 4:05 p.m.

⁷ The city of Saraqib is militarily controlled by the National Front for Liberation/NFL and by the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham/HTS administratively through its affiliated Salvation Government.



Destruction in the city of Saraqib caused by bombardment on July 22, 2019. Photo credit: STJ.

STJ's field researcher documented the names of casualties, who died in the airstrike on Saraqib city:

1. Asmaa al-Muhaimeed.
2. Little girl Aya Sameer al-Zarzori.
3. Mahmoud Nasser Ajaj.
4. Little boy Mohammad Hussam al-Zarzori.
5. Little boy Mohammad Anwar Khattab.
6. Little boy Abdulkareem Hisham Sattouf.
7. Hussam al-Zarzori.
8. Ali Ibrahim al-Ali.

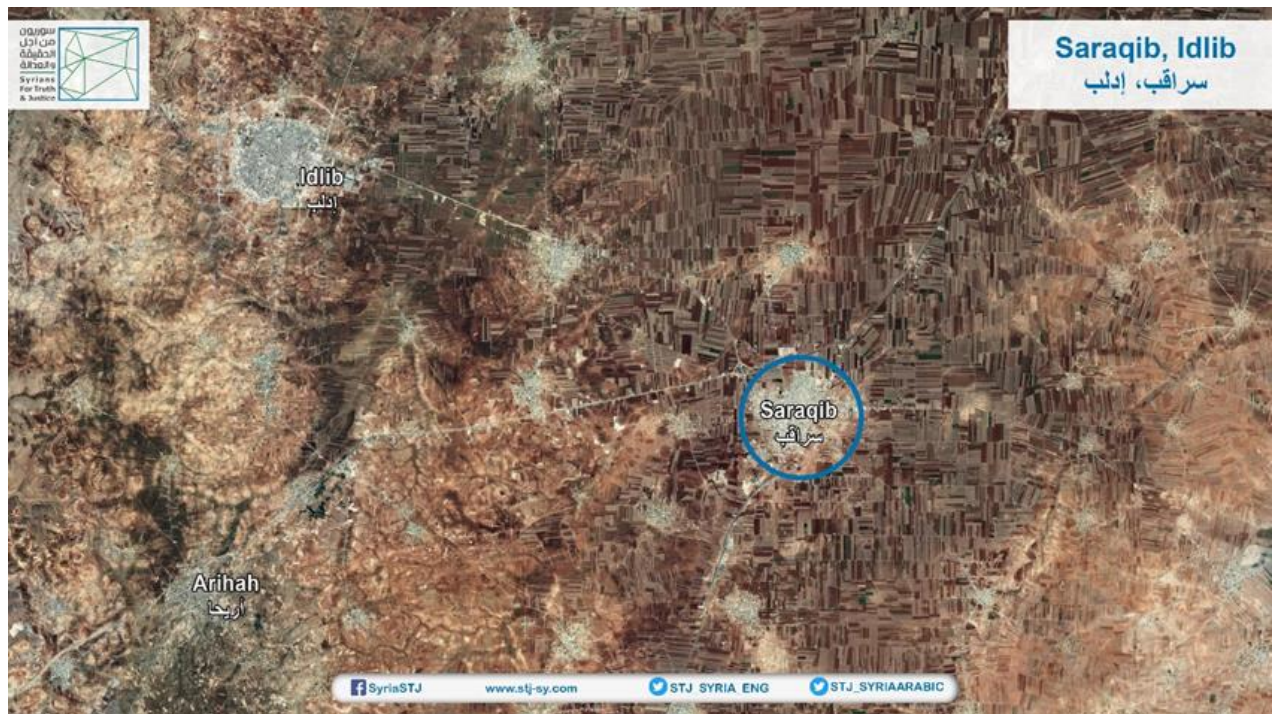
A video⁸, posted by one of Saraqib city's media activist, documents the extent of destruction that the city suffered due to shelling on July 22, 2019.



Footage extracted from the above mentioned [video](#), showing the destruction inflicted upon Saraqib city by the shelling on July 22, 2019.

⁸ For further information, refer to the following link:

<https://www.facebook.com/mahmoud.bakkour.568/videos/2441058835979278/>.



Satellite image of Saraqib city's location.



Saraqib city's attack location.



Analysis of visual evidence.



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