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***Syria: Assault on Idlib Leaves
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Syrian military and its Russian ally intensified military action prior to seizing Al-Tamanah on August 30, 2019

Introduction

Syrian troops backed by Russian airpower continue to escalate their hostilities on southern rural Idlib, especially on the villages located on the Damascus-Aleppo international highway (known as M5), which goes through Idlib. In this report, STJ details the bombardments took place on 27, 28 and 29 August 2019, and the casualties resulted from them, which eventually led to the Syrian forces and allied controlling the town of Al-Tamanah eastern the town of Khan Shaykhun on August 30, 2019.¹

On August 29, 2019 Syrian Army jets bombed residential neighborhoods in the village of Maar Shamsah,² located near the M5 highway, killing four civilians, including two women and a child and forcing many civilians to flee towards the border areas.

On August 28, 2019 regime warplanes fired all the 12 missiles they were loaded with, on residential neighborhoods in the city of Ma'arat al-Nu'man, which is located on the M5 highway.³ That resulted in a massacre involving at least 13 deaths and 36 injuries among civilians, most of whom were children between 2 and 15 years of age. The attack caused significant material damage to properties of civilians as well, prompting many of them to move to safer areas.

On August 27, 2019, the Syrian Army attacked residential areas in the village of Ma'ar Shoreen⁴-3 km away from Ma'arat al-Nu'man city and near the M5 highway- with barrel bombs and naval mines, killing, injuring and displacing numerous civilians.

Russia's Defense Ministry said that the Syrian forces would begin a unilateral ceasefire in Idlib on August 31, 2019.⁵ But STJ field researcher, however, confirmed that the military operations didn't completely stop in Idlib despite the ceasefire agreement.

This wasn't the first time southern rural Idlib witnessed such offensive by the Syrian Army and allies. STJ had documented earlier attacks on residential neighborhoods in northern rural Hama and the town of Khan Shaykhun, which claimed the lives of many civilians, mostly children.⁶

¹ The Syrian forces and allies managed to control the town of Khan Shaykhun on August 21, 2019.

² Controlled by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS).

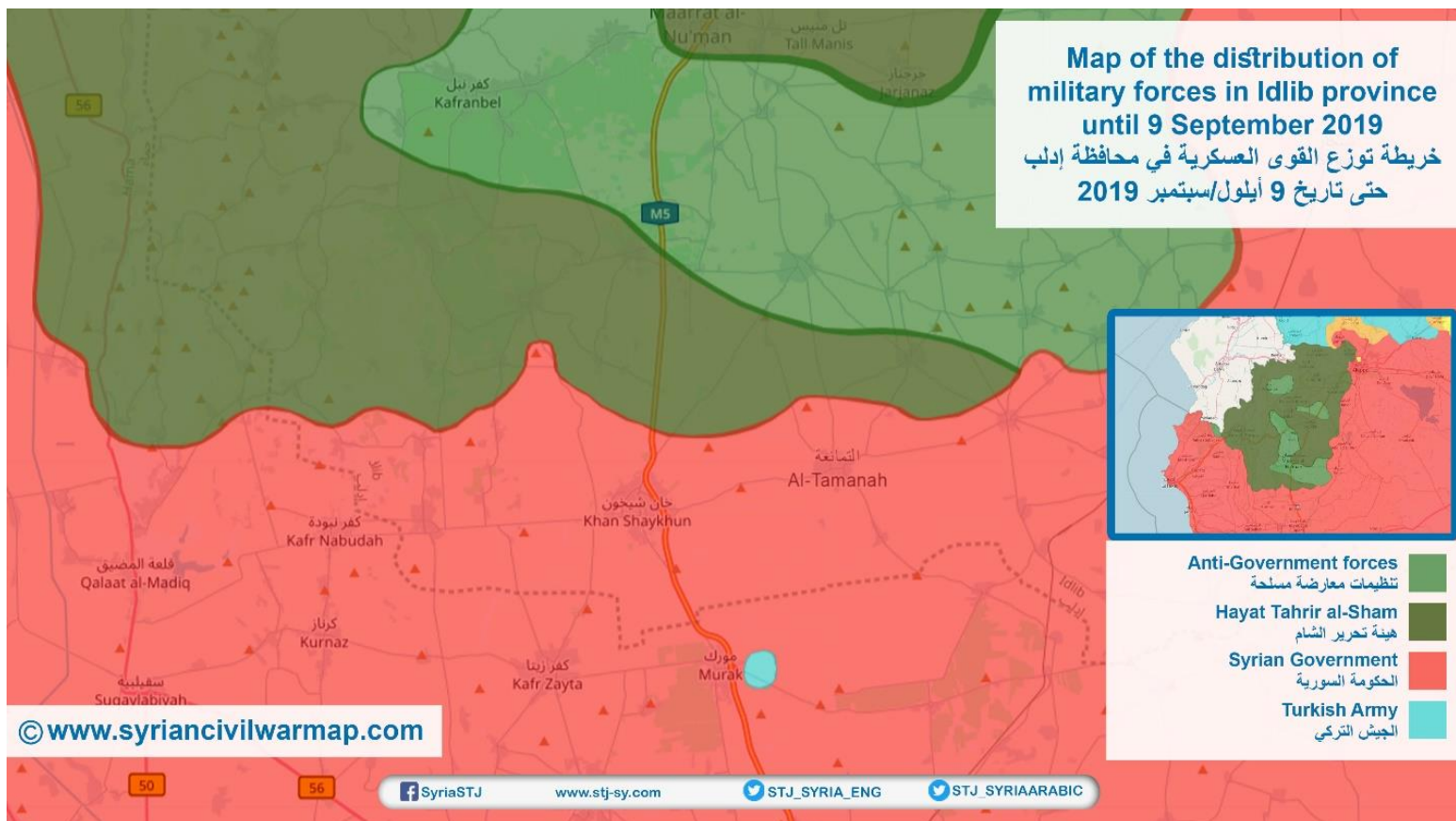
³ Controlled by HTS.

⁴ Controlled by HTS.

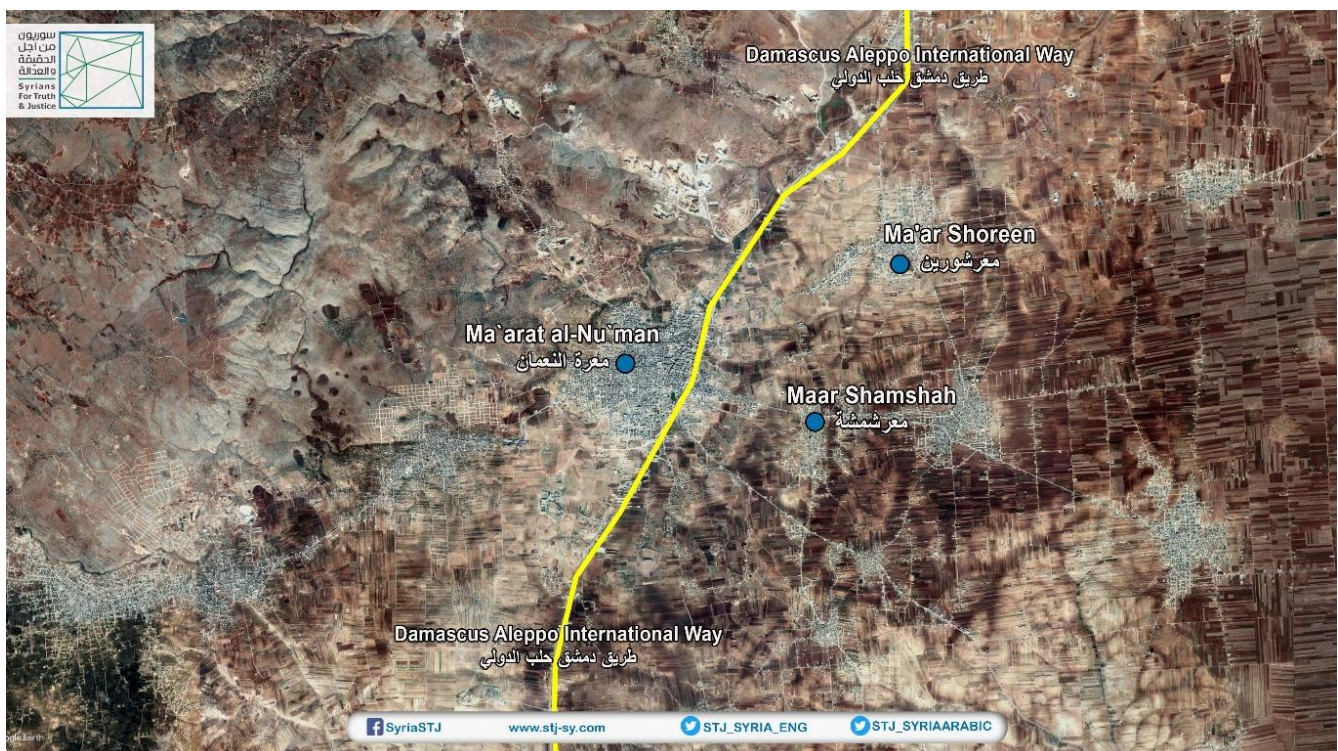
⁵ "Syrian army to unilaterally cease fire in Idlib tomorrow", RT, August 30, 2019

https://arabic.rt.com/middle_east/1041984-%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%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%86-%D9%88%D9%82%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A5%D8%AF%D9%84%D8%A8-%D8%BA%D8%AF%D8%A7/?fbclid=IwAR0TN-EcYGZwo7Opd_4QmULU3ybFZUbfiXaKoG6ogOOdmoWcDmrz8l46B6s

⁶ "Syria: Violent Airstrikes Take Toll on Civilians, including Children, in Southern Rural Idlib", STJ, August 31, 2019 <https://stj-sy.org/en/syria-violent-airstrikes-take-toll-on-civilians-including-children-in-southern-rural-idlib/>.



Who controls what in Idlib, September 9, 2019. Photo credit: Syria live map. (STJ made some changes)



A satellite image illustrates the locations of Ma'arat al-Nu'man city, and the villages of Ma'ar Shoreen and Maar Shamshah, located on the M5 highway in southern rural Idlib.

I. Two women and a child were the victims of attacks on the village of Maar Shamshah

The village of [Maar Shamshah](#) has witnessed vicious attacks since the launch of the offensive by the government forces and allies on southern rural Idlib near the M5 highway. As on August 29, 2019 a Syrian MiG-21 fired high explosive missiles on residential neighborhoods on the village center, leaving many civilians dead or wounded, including women and children, and forcing many others to flee towards safer areas.

A local of Maar Shamshah, who was near the attack site talked to STJ saying:

"I was home with my family, at about 8.30 am., when a huge explosion rocked the village. We got so scared, since the attack was out of the blue. I rushed to the walkie-talkie to hear the Sentry service, which was reporting an airstrike on the center of the village. I headed to the attacked site; it was a horrible scene. There were flames in houses and shops, and injured people asking for help. I saw a man burning on his motorcycle and died after a while, though the civil defense tried to save him. There was also a child stuck in the rubble; the civil defense teams managed to rescue him."

A victim's brother talked to STJ saying:

"My sister Hana' Mohammad Ali,40, died by her house' ceiling fall on her as a result of the attack, while her husband got shrapnel in the arms, which led to their amputation. They are already a poor family with six children, whose only breadwinner is now become disabled."





Destruction caused by bombardments on residential neighborhoods in the village of Maar Shamshah on August 29, 2019. Photo credit: STJ.

A media activist from Maar Shamshah confirmed to STJ that warplanes hit the main street of the village-which has only residential buildings and shops- with two missiles, killing three civilians including a woman and two children as well as causing large scale destruction.

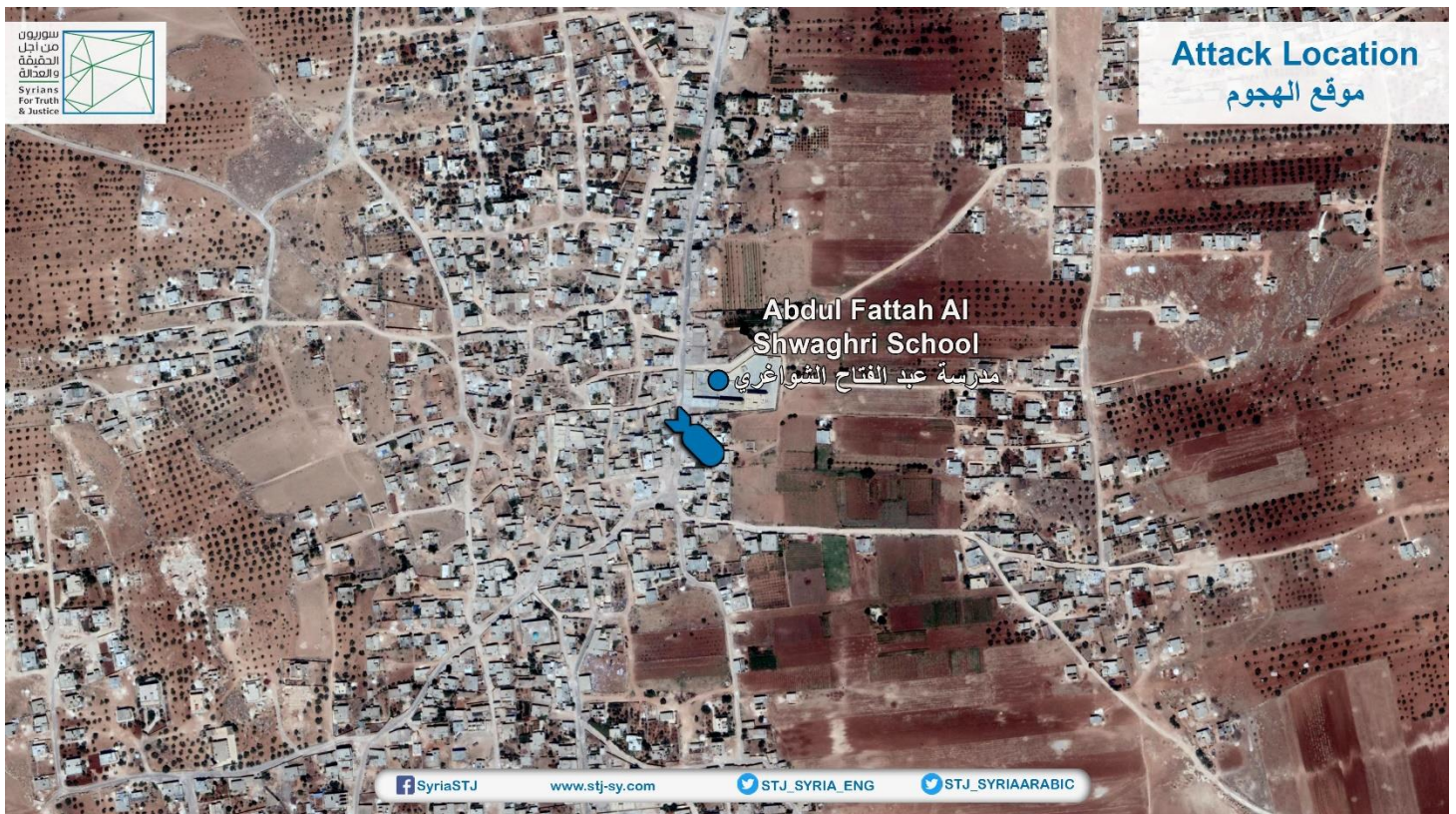
A monitor of a sentry in Idlib reported that the attack was conducted by a MiG-21 fighter, which took off from Hama military airport at 8.10 am and headed north reaching Maar Shamshah at 8.30 am, and hitting it with two high explosive missiles.

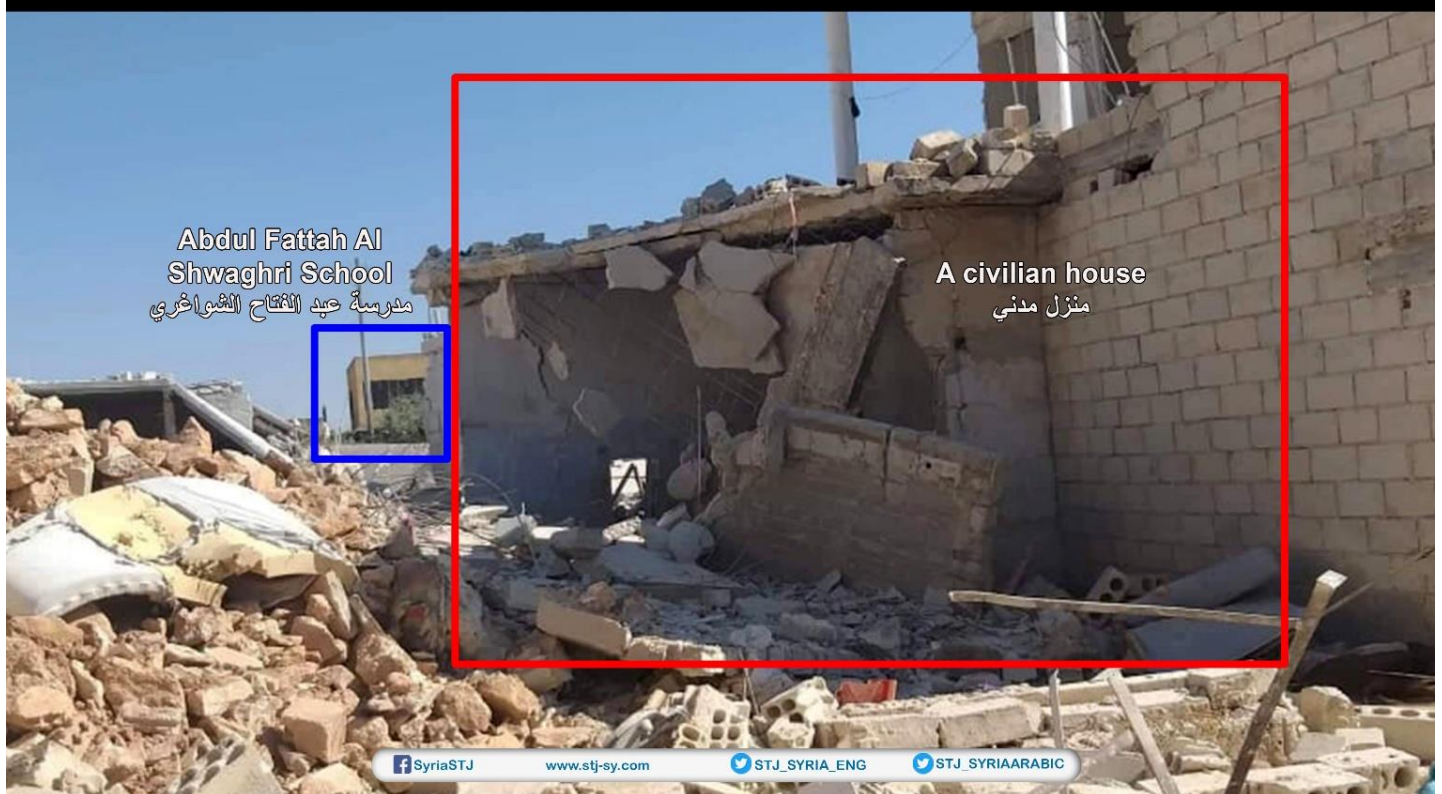
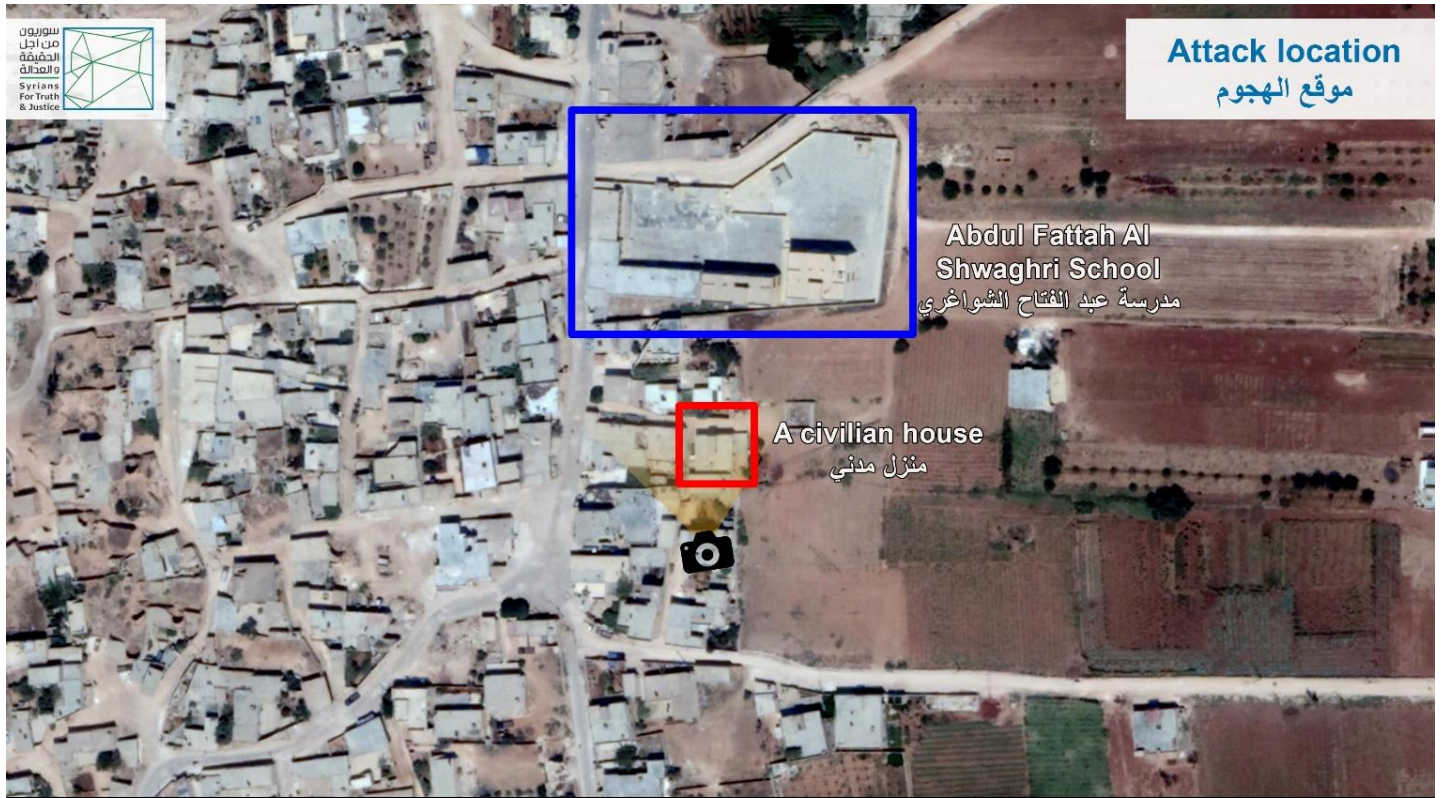
STJ field researcher could identify some of the civilians fell in the attack on Maar Shamshah, they are:

1. Hana' Mohammad Ali, 40, married with six children, from the village of Maar Shamshah.
2. Sa'aed Mohammad Deeb, 37, a farmer, married with six children from the village of Maar Shamshah.
3. Maha Waleed al-Hajem, 27, married with three children, from the village of Maar Shamshah.
4. Abdul Maheen Mustafa, 7, from the village of Maar Shamshah.



Destruction caused to residential buildings by airstrikes on the village of Maar Shamshah on August 29, 2019. Photo credit: STJ.





II. 9 children, two women and others killed in a horrific attack

Ma`arat al-Nu`man, located on M5 highway, was one of the cities in southern rural Idlib which has also witnessed violent attacks since late April 2019 and lost many of its civilians as a result; being dead or displaced towards border areas.

Details of the massacre:

At around 6.50 pm on August 28, 2019, a Syrian air force Sukhoi Su-24 attacked populated neighborhoods in southern and western Ma`arat al-Nu`man, which resulted in a massacre of 13 people, mostly children aged between 2 and 15, and more than 36 injuries, mostly serious necessitating amputations, according to Mahmoud al-Tanari, a local who was near the targeted site. Mahmoud talked to STJ saying:

“There was a reconnaissance drone flying over the city prior to a warning from the Sentry of an approaching Sukhoi. I ran and hid in a safe place mere minutes before the jet conducted the raid causing huge explosions shook the city. When it was over, I headed to the attacked scene, where houses and cars were burning and sending thick plumes of smoke. Civil defense teams were rescuing the injured and pulling out victims from under the rubble. There was a 17-year-old boy on the ground covered with blood but still alive; I called for the civil defense to help him, but unfortunately, he soon died. A whole family was buried under the rubble, people were running in every direction and cries of women and children were heard from everywhere. It was like doomsday.”





Destruction in a residential building in Ma'arat al-Nu'man as a result of bombardments of August 28, 2019. Photo credit: STJ.

Mohammad Bala'as, a media activist in Ma'arat al-Nu'man gave STJ a statement confirming that the jet fighter which conducted the raid had taken off from the [al-Seen Military Airbase](#) in the province of Homs. He added that the jet dropped all its loads of high explosive missiles on the western and southern neighborhoods of the city which had a children's playground and a popular market called the 'Wednesday Market'. He said:

"People of Ma'arat al-Nu'man were in panic, since the jet fighters were in the city's skies all the time, even after conducting their raids on almost all neighborhoods of the city, causing mass fires and destruction, particularly in civilian houses, which destroyed over the heads of their residents. In some neighborhoods, entire families were buried under the rubble. More than 36 injuries and 13 deaths reported. I saw children turned into pieces, and elderlies trying to survive. Civil defense teams worked for long hours, as they obliged to evacuate the site repeatedly -for the jet fighters bombed it again and again."

A relative of the seven-year-old child victim Nawras Ayman Jouban, said that the latter died in the attack from shrapnel pierced his body when he was playing in the street. Noting that the Nawras family had displaced to Ma'arat al-Nu'man from western rural Hama because they thought it's a safer place.



The seven-year-old child victim Ayman Jouban. Photo credit: the child's family.

Mohammad al-Daher, a media activist from Ma`arat al-Nu`man said to STJ that the last heightened offensive caused mass displacement, emptying the city of its people. As they fled towards border areas taking shelter under olive trees, since there were not enough houses for them. The activist added that the attacks on Ma`arat al-Nu`man coincided with others on different areas in Idlib province, particularly its south and the town of Aldier Alsharki and on Jarjanaz village.

A monitor of a sentry in Idlib confirmed to STJ that a Syrian regime Sukhoi Su-24 took off from al-Seen Military Airbase in the province of Homs at 6.33 pm., headed north and entered Idlib skies reaching Ma`arat al-Nu`man at 6.51 pm., where it fired 12 high explosive missiles at once on residential buildings.

According to STJ field researcher, the city of Ma`arat al-Nu`man had earlier seen several such massacres, which claimed the lives of many civilians. As on August 22, 2019 the Syrian air force hit residential neighborhoods in the city with barrel bombs and naval mines, while on July 22, 2019 it attacked a popular market in it killing at least 42 people and injuring 62 others.⁷

⁷ "Syria: Joint Syrian-Russian Aerial Attacks Render Dozens of Civilians Dead in Idlib", STJ, August 2, 2019, <https://stj-sy.org/en/syria-joint-syrian-russian-aerial-attacks-render-dozens-of-civilians-dead-in-idlib/>.

A video footage released by Idlib Media Center on August 29, 2019, and circulated by media activists, showed the jet fighter firing 11 missiles at once on the city of Ma`arat al-Nu`man on August 28, 2019.⁸



A screenshot taken from the aforementioned [footage](#) shows the warplane firing 11 missiles on the city of Ma`arat al-Nu`man on August 28, 2019.

Another footage circulated by news websites showed the moments right after the attack.⁹



A screenshot taken from the aforementioned [footage](#) shows the first moments of the attack on Ma`arat al-Nu`man on August 28, 2019.

⁸ For more info please check:

<https://www.facebook.com/EdlibEmc1/videos/1166982516821831/?v=1166982516821831>.

⁹ For more info please check: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VE6c4XCnue8>.

A footage circulated by media activists showed bodies of children killed in the attack on Ma`arat al-Nu`man on August 28, 2019.¹⁰



A screenshot taken from the aforementioned [footage](#) shows the bodies of the children fell in the attack on Ma`arat al-Nu`man on August 28, 2019.



A side of the destruction caused by airstrikes on residential neighborhoods in the city of Ma`arat al-Nu`man on August 28, 2019. Photo credit: STJ.

¹⁰ For more info please check:

https://www.facebook.com/mustafa.199000/videos/2405004599781356/UzpfSTewMDAwMzg3Nzl2ODY3MDpWSzoxNTlyNTc0ODU0NTUwMzQ1/?query=%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A9%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B9%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86&epa=SEARCH_BOX

STJ field researcher could identify some of the civilian victims fell in the attacks on the city of Ma`arat al-Nu`man:

1. Yassin al-Mulhim, 11, from Ma`arat al-Nu`man.
2. Jihad Hassan al-Shallah, 1(1/2) years, from Ma`arat al-Nu`man.
3. Nawras Ayman Jouban, 7, from the town of Hawash in western rural Hama.
4. Ahmed Younis Ad Darwish, 4, from Ma`arat al-Nu`man.
5. Mahmoud Mohammad al-Hamwi, 5, from Ma`arat al-Nu`man.
6. Mustafa Mohammad al-Hamwi, 4, from Ma`arat al-Nu`man.
7. Ahmed Mohammad al-Hamwi, 2, from Ma`arat al-Nu`man.
8. Ahmed Abdul karim al-Barq, 15, from Ma`arat al-Nu`man.
9. Abdullah Ya`aroub al-Hameed, 15, from Ma`arat al-Nu`man.
10. Ghalia Darwish, 65, from Ma`arat al-Nu`man.
11. Nadra Darwish, 37, married, from Ma`arat al-Nu`man.
12. Ahmed al-Hussein from Ma`arat al-Nu`man.
13. Mustafa Mazen Kreidi from Ma`arat al-Nu`man.



The child victim Jihad Hassan al-Shallah, 1(1/2) years old, killed in the attack on Ma`arat al-Nu`man on August 28, 2019. Photo credit: a relative of the child.



The four-year-old child victim Ahmed Younis al-Darweesh, who fell in the attacks on Ma`arat al-Nu`man on August 28, 2019. Photo credit: the child's relatives.



The child victim Yaseen al-Milhim, 11, killed in the attack on Ma`arat al-Nu`man on August 28, 2019. Photo credit: a relative of the child.



The child victim Abdullah Ya`aroub al-Hameed, 15, killed in the attack on Ma`arat al-Nu`man on August 28, 2019. Photo credit: a relative of the child.



A side of the damage caused to a residential neighborhood in Ma'arat al-Nu'man and the children's playground it has, by bombardments of August 28, 2019. Photo credit: STJ.



III. Barrel bombs and naval mines hit neighborhoods in Ma'ar Shoreen

On August 27, 2019 helicopters targeted all residential neighborhoods in the village of Ma'ar Shoreen, located on the M5 road, with barrel bombs and naval mines, leaving many civilians dead or injured.

On the same day at 5.00 pm., five Syrian helicopters took off from [Hamah Military Airport](#), according to sentries, and dropped all their loads of barrel bombs and naval mines on residential neighborhoods in Ma'ar Shoreen, killing two elderly women, a child and a young man and injuring 10 people, as reported by a witness who talked to STJ saying:

“That morning, I was home with my husband and sons waiting for my relatives-who were on their way returning from pilgrimage (Hajj)-when we saw a Sukhoi fighter dropping all its loads on the neighboring village of Talmenes. Then we heard from the walkie talkie that many civilians fell in that attack. We got frightened and hid in one of our house’s rooms. However, when I then heard the sentry warning of approaching helicopters had taken off from Hamah Military Airport, I started shaking with fear and felt my heart would stop when I heard their sound. After mere seconds, two helicopters dropped all their loads of barrel bombs on the eastern neighborhood. My children and I started screaming with fear and I said to my husband that I feel it was the end and we would die then. Shortly after, another helicopter approached and hit the western and northern neighborhoods with barrel bombs. We left the house at once barefoot and ride the car towards a safer area, surrounded by bombardments from all sides and seeing people running in all directions. All I wanted was to survive with my children.”



A side of the destruction in the village of Ma'ar Shoreen after being bombed by barrel bombs and naval mines on August 27, 2019. Photo credit: STJ.

According to a further statement given to STJ by Saad Zidan, a media activist who was near the scene of the attack, the violent attacks on Ma'ar Shoreen created fear among locals which prompted many of them to flee on foot, by cars or by motorcycles. Especially that there were five helicopters taking turns bombing residential neighborhoods in the village, which caused fires and great destruction in the property of civilians, as well as the killing two elderly women and a child and injuring others.

A civil defense member who was in the attacked site said to STJ:

“Civil defense teams headed to the scene of the attack to pull out victims from under the rubble. Many difficulties impeded our work, mainly the continued bombardments on people gatherings and residential neighborhoods. However, we managed to take the wounded to the nearest hospitals.”



Destruction caused to residential buildings in the village of Ma'ar Shoreen by bombardments with barrel bombs and naval mines, August 27, 2019. Photo credit: STJ.

STJ field researcher could identify some of the victims who fell in the attack on the residential neighborhood in the village of Ma'ar Shoreen, they are:

1. Naima Ibrahim Al-Hassan, 60, from the village of Ma'ar Shoreen.
2. Fatima al-Sahn al-Taweel, 70, from Ma'ar Shoreen.
3. Ahmad Al-Abrash, 12 years old, born in Ma'ar Shoreen.
4. Wael Abdul-Aziz al-Qaddour, 20, from Ma'ar Shoreen.



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.