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## Raqqa: Violations Committed by the “National Army” in Tell Abiad

## **Raqqa: Violations Committed by the “National Army” in Tell Abiad**

*Once in control of the area on October 13, 2019, the al-Jabha al-Shamiyah/Levant Front and Faylaq al-Majd/Glory Corps committed numerous violations, including holding civilians as captives on the front lines, seizure of privately-owned properties and robberies*

## 1. Background:

On October 9, 2019, the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan [announced](#)<sup>1</sup> the start of a military operation in Syria, decoding it the Peace Spring, with the direct participation of Syrian armed opposition groups, operating under the National Army, affiliated with the Syrian Interim Government, an offshoot of the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces.

One day before the military operation, the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces made a statement expressing solidarity with a soon to be launched military offensive in the area. The statement said: “The Coalition also supports the efforts of the Syrian National Army, the Ministry of Defense, and Chief of Staff. It stresses that the Syrian National Army is ready to combat terror in cooperation and joint action with the brothers in Turkey.”<sup>2</sup>

For his part, the Minister of Defense of the Syrian Interim Government, Salim Idris, has on October 7, 2019, declared that the National Army has completed the training needed for the approaching military operation in northeast Syria<sup>3</sup>. This was preceded by other military arrangements, for the National Army and the National Front for Liberation announced merger on October 5, 2019.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Current State of Affairs in Tell Abiad City:

With the outbreak of the Operation Peace Spring on October 9, 2019, the city of Tell Abiad and its surrounding villages bore witness to mass waves of displacement, which almost depopulated the area during the military clashes that aimed at controlling the city and its countryside. On October 13, the National Army, the Faylaq al-Majd/Glory Corps and the al-Jabha al-Shamiah/Levant Front in particular, took over the city of Tell Abiad and several of the villages within its administrative borders, under the frame of Operation Peace Spring. About a week later, several Arab families, which number is yet unidentified, started returning

<sup>1</sup> The tweet: “On the foreheads of the members of the Mohammedan Army, the heroes, participating in the Peace Spring, I plant a kiss. I wish them success and best of luck, and to all local personnel, who are in support of and on Turkey’s side in this operation. May Allah guide you and be with you in your quest.” The Turkish President’s, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Twitter account. October 9, 2019. Last visited: November 20, 2019. [https://twitter.com/rterdogan\\_ar/status/1181927322271830016?s=20](https://twitter.com/rterdogan_ar/status/1181927322271830016?s=20).

<sup>2</sup> “Syrian Coalition Reaffirms Commitment to Fighting Terrorism & Liberating Syria from Tyranny & Terrorist Orgs.” Press release. Syrian National Coalition- Syria, Department of Media & Communications. October 10, 2019. Last visited: November 20, 2019. <http://en.etilaf.org/press/syrian-coalition-reaffirms-commitment-to-fighting-terrorism-liberating-syria-from-tyranny-terrorist-orgs.html>.

<sup>3</sup> “National Army Completes Preparations to Participate in Military Operation in East of Euphrates.” Turkish Yeni Şafak. October 7, 2019. Last visited: November 20, 2019. <https://www.yenisafak.com/ar/news/3438458>.

<sup>4</sup> “National Army Integrated into National Front for Liberation: Syrian Move against Who?” The New Arab. October 5, 2019. Last visited: November 20, 2019.

<https://www.alaraby.co.uk/politics/2019/10/4/%D8%AF%D9%85%D8%AC-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D8%B7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D9%80-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%A8%D9%87%D8%A9-%D8%AE%D8%B7%D9%88%D8%A9-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%B6%D8%AF-%D9%85%D9%86-1>.

to the city. However, a large segment of the city's population, especially Kurdish families did not head back to their homes, which used to mainly populate two neighborhoods — al-Jisr/Bridge Neighborhood and al-Lail/Night Neighborhood —in addition to few families who lived near the Al-Munbatah Road. The families, who chose not to return, attributed their decision to fear of potential reprisals or arbitrary arrests, similar to what is happening in Afrin District, after it was controlled during the Operation Olive Branch.<sup>5</sup>

The field researcher of Syrians for Truth and Justice/STJ pointed out that no more than 15 families are yet living in the city of Tell Abiad, given that Kurds constituted about 25 to 30% of the city's total population before the Operation Peace Spring. Additionally, the researcher has not so far recorded the return of any Kurdish family to Tell Abiad City to the date this report was published.

On October 22, 2019, the Faylaq al-Majd/Glory Corps posted a tweet on its official account, saying that the Interim Syrian Government-affiliated Tell Abiad Local Council has resumed its civil activities within the city, adding, however in a different tweet, that the National Army is providing the city's bakeries with flour.

The al-Jabha al-Shamīyah/Levant Front and Faylaq al-Majd/Glory Corps, according to STJ's researcher who is based in Tell Abiad City, share control over the area, and both have embarked on arrest and inspection raids in search of people belonging/working for the Autonomous Administration. Nonetheless, no arrests were recorded, despite the fact that a number of civilians were either subjected to beating or held in detention for a few hours.

On November 2, 2019, the city witnessed a car bomb, which effected casualties, STJ's field researcher reported, adding that the two armed groups erected checkpoints within and on the entrances to the city after the blast. STJ is also working on a report that investigates into the mentioned explosion and another that took place in the city of Suluk on November 10, 2019.

### 3. Practices and Violations Committed by the National Army in Tell Abiad:

STJ's field researcher monitored numerous violations in the city of Tell Abiad and a number of its administratively affiliated villages, the perpetrators of which were the al-Jabha al-Shamīyah/Levant Front and Faylaq al-Majd/Glory Corps, personally meeting 6 eyewitness and people directly affected by these violations, who all refused to reveal their identities for security concerns or fear of potential reprisals.

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<sup>5</sup> For further information on the arrests and other violations the Kurd citizens are being subjected to in Afrin District, refer to the reports published by STJ under the tag "Afrin": <https://stj-sy.org/en/tag/afrin/>.

The violations, STJ's field researcher pointed out, ranged from holding civilians as captives on the immediate front lines between the al-Jabha al-Shamiah/Levant Front and the Syrian Democratic Forces/SDF, robberies of money and cattle, to seizure of houses and shops. The incidents took place as thus:

1). **Al-Sard/Dadat Village (housing a Turkmen majority):** On October 10, 2019, an armed group of the al-Jabha al-Shamiah/Levant Front, led by a person called Shaikh Juma, held captive the people who were in the village, including over 30 children, and detained them in a house on the outskirts of the village, only 500 meters away from the first front line with the SDF. The group confined the civilians and confiscated their mobile phones and identity documents. Backed by militants of the National Army, the group used the civilians' cars and motorcycles for military purposes; they also threatened two other civilians with weapons, coercing them into giving the militants two cars, a Toyota and a Suzuki, to use them for transporting personnel and weapons.

While the civilians were held captive for a few hours, militants of the National Army progressed to the opposite side of the village, where the SDF was stationed. Despite the civilians' warnings that the area is planted with mines, the militants continued to advance until a mine exploded, hitting a group of them. After this, a confrontation with medium-arms broke out between the two sides, ignoring the civilians detained in a place close to the clashes' site. During the confrontations, four of the National Army's militants died, which withdrew on the spot, without securing or informing the civilians of its retreat. About two hours later, the civilians managed to escape the house and headed to the borders, to return to their homes the next day, after they spent the night in the open air. One of the eyewitnesses, who was held captive back then, told STJ the following:

**"The militants searched all the village's houses and robbed varied amounts of money during the hours they held us in captivity. They stole 100.000 Syrian Pounds of the house of Ahmad D. and another 75.000 of that belonging to Khalil D. The militants have also confiscated all the cellphones, more than 40 ones, and returned only 15, which were old and cheap."**

The eyewitness added that the militants arrested a civilian called Abdulkareem Dada, after he received a call from a friend. They brutally beat him and almost shot him with live bullets, if it was not for a number of civilians who intervened to prevent them. When the military operations ended on October 13, 2019, the al-Jabha al-Shamiah/Levant Front took over the village and turned its old Police Station into a military post.

2). **Tell Abiad City:** STJ's field researcher reported that the al-Jabha al-Shamiah/Levant Front has confiscated all the houses and shops belonging to Syrian Kurdish citizens, which are particularly located on the al-Jisr Neighborhood, considered one of the city's major



neighborhoods as it incubates several shops and the city's main marketplace, knowing that the shops are primarily owned by Kurds. They did the same on the al-Lail Neighborhood, where the armed group especially embarked on seizing houses of people operating under the SDF/People's Protection Units/YPG, turning them into military stations and housing units for its militants, including houses owned by the families of Jamish, al-Kourhassat, al-Khlfoh and al-Bohzan. The locks to the shops and the houses of the civilian Kurds, however, were taken down with live bullets, searched and stolen, for all the money found there was robbed. The armed group is refusing to hand the house or the shop to his/her owner, until the latter brings witnesses and a title deed that proves ownership to the real estate, in addition to which the owner has to confirm not having worked, neither before nor at the time, with the Autonomous Administration or any of its affiliated forces, given that such procedures are almost inaccessible for the lack of clear criteria that govern the process, an independent judiciary and civil independent sides.



A photo of a house located on the al-Jisr Neighborhood, Tell Abiad City, belonging to a commander of the SDF, called Khalil Bouzan, which the al-Jabha al-Shamiyah/Levant Front seized. Photo credit: STJ.



The door to Khalil al-Abdallah's house, on the al-Lail Neighborhood, Tell Abiad City, which lock was broken down with bullets. Photo credit: STJ.

3). **Tell Abiad Sharqi Village (2 kilometers east of Tell Abiad City):** One of the eyewitnesses, met in person by STJ's field researcher, narrated the following:

**"The militants of the Faylaq al-Majd/Glory Corps entered the village of Tell Abiad Sharqi on October 15, 2019. They searched the whole village. The manner with which they carried out the inspection made it clear that they were looking for money, gold and valuable things, not wanted persons or weapons. They stole 25 olive oil cans from a house, belonging to citizen D. Kh. They ripped open the doors to all the houses and shops, owned by Kurds and confiscated them, saying that they will not give the house or the shop back to the owner, unless the latter proves his ownership of the property and refers to the armed group's security service."**

Commenting on a second incident, the witness added:

**"The militants of the Faylaq al-Majd/Glory Corps broke into the house of a person called al-Shaikh Hamdi, one of the heads of the Anaizan Clan/al-Naeem Tribe, and stole 15 million Syrian Pounds. When the news went viral and was met by the people's anger, the al-Jabha al-Shamiah/Levant Front deployed a group of its militants, who coerced the Faylaq al-Majd/Glory Corps to return the full sum of money to its owner."**

In a third incident, a witness, close to the militants of the al-Jabha al-Shamiah/Levant Front, told STJ's field researcher the following:

**"While raiding the village of Tell Abiad Sharqi, seeking to capture a wanted man, called Jabri al-Hardan, militants of the Front's security service stormed the house of Ahmad al-Elaiwi and stole a million and seven hundred Syrian Pounds. The next day, the money owner filed a complaint at the Front-affiliated security service's headquarters, being the old Municipality's building. The personnel there denied the robbery and detained Ahmad for three days. Ahmad was not released until he dropped the complaint and stated that he was not stolen."**

4). **Al-Mshrfeh Village:** One of the villagers talked to STJ's field researcher, saying the following:

**"Militants of the al-Jabha al-Shamiah/Levant Front held captive the village/komen's mukhtar<sup>6</sup>, called Mashaal al-Anaizan. They beat the man and stole his herd of sheep. They also seized his house and turned it into a military post."**

It is important to mention that Syrian local media outlets have published news reporting the National Army's seizure of several houses in Tell Abiad. The Jesr Press<sup>7</sup> posted photos of a house on which the word mahjouz/seized is written, for the benefit of the al-Jabha al-Shamiah/Levant Front and two persons called Abu Abas and Abu Marwan. In addition to this, Smart News Agency reported that the National Army has formed an Economic Commission to count and define the public and privately-owned buildings, which are to be seized and which contents are to be totally confiscated in preparation to sell these personal belongings in a public auction.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The head of the village or a neighborhood.

<sup>7</sup> "Tell Abiad: Jesr's Correspondent Monitors Violations of Civilians' Rights Committed by Factions of the National Army." Jesr Press. October 18, 2019. Last visited: November 20, 2019. <https://www.jesrpress.com/2019/10/18/23282/>.

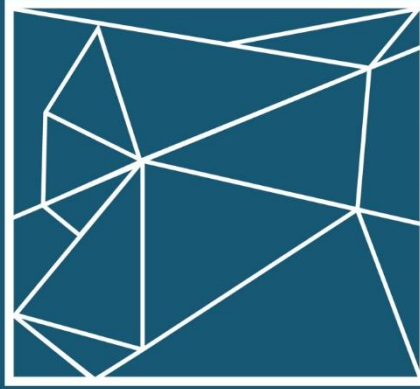
<sup>8</sup> "National Army Forms Commission to Confiscate and Seize Public and Privately-owned Property in Tell Abiad City." November 16, 2019. Last visited: November 20, 2019. [https://smartnews-agency.com/ar/wires/410378/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D8%B7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%B4%D9%83%D9%84-%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%86%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A8-%D9%85%D9%85%D8%AA%D9%84%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B5%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A?utm\\_source=dlvr.it&utm\\_medium=facebook&utm\\_campaign=smart%20news%20agency%20%20%20-%D9%88%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9%20%D8%B3%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AA%20%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%86%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%A1&fbclid=IwAR1lgYB0h9F8EOycCDdFhcApMHhhoKDy28iv82EcJ884eiHinl5ks2pyvuk](https://smartnews-agency.com/ar/wires/410378/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D8%B7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%B4%D9%83%D9%84-%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%86%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A8-%D9%85%D9%85%D8%AA%D9%84%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B5%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=facebook&utm_campaign=smart%20news%20agency%20%20%20-%D9%88%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9%20%D8%B3%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AA%20%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%86%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%A1&fbclid=IwAR1lgYB0h9F8EOycCDdFhcApMHhhoKDy28iv82EcJ884eiHinl5ks2pyvuk).



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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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