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The Bombing of Idlib's Marketplaces by Syrian Regular Forces and Allies, a Repeated Pattern

The Bombing of Idlib's Marketplaces by Syrian Regular Forces and Allies, a Repeated Pattern

This report documents the death of dozens of civilians and the displacement of tens of thousands as violent assaults made a target of overcrowded marketplaces in Idlib throughout December 2019 and January 2020

Executive Summary

At the onset of December 2019, the Syrian regular forces and their allies made overcrowded marketplaces in [the province of Idlib](#) the focus of their assaults, especially those conducted in the cities and towns in southern rural Idlib—ones located near the M5 International Highway, which connects Damascus and Aleppo while passing through the province of Idlib. Covering the period from early December 2019 through early January 2020, Syrians for Truth and Justice/STJ has monitored four brutal attacks on jammed marketplaces, particularly those in Jabal al-Zawiyah, adjacent to the reported highway, which took a toll on several civilians, including women and children.

On December 7, 2019, alone, **two violent attacks** took place: **The first** was aimed at a marketplace in [the town of Baluon](#), a market designated for clothes, where warplanes, believed to be Russian, launched a missile that landed in the center of the marketplace, putting to death nine civilians and injuring 12 others, among whom were both women and children.

The **second attack**, however, targeted the marketplace in [the town of al-Bara](#), where fruits and vegetables are sold, for warplanes, also believed to be Russian, have embarked on four successive raids on the marketplace, rendering four civilians dead, including a child and two women, effecting also a massive material damage that befell several civilian homes in the vicinity of the targeted marketplace.

On December 2, 2019, **two additional attacks** were documented: **The first** was launched against the marketplace in [the city of Saraqib](#), rendering dead a civilian and injuring five others. The **second attack** was carried out less than two hours later, hitting the marketplace in [the city of Ma`arat al-Nu`man](#), which brought nine civilians to their death and wounded 12 others.

While the four assaults were monitored and recorded, it became evident that the attacked marketplaces were being targeted either in the morning or at noon, meaning the hours corresponding to the major commercial activity during the day and overcrowdedness on the part of civilians, not to mention that the attacks' sites are clear of any nearby military presence.

In total, the attacks caused the displacement of tens of thousands of locals to northern border areas, which in one way or another indicates the Syrian regular forces' intention at emptying these areas of their residents and sending them away from their houses in a step to hold the reins to power there, specifically in the areas located near the Damascus-Aleppo International Highway, known as the M5.

It is also likely that the Syrian Regular forces and their allies have focused their attacks on marketplaces full of civilian crowds in the province of Idlib to enforce further economic restrictions on the populace, in an attempt at imposing what sounds like economic sanctions on the locals in retaliation to the sanctions imposed on the central government in Damascus.

STJ has also monitored two separate attacks which took a toll on 10 children, for one of these assaults has affected a house belonging to a civilian based in [the town of Abadeta](#), located on the M5 International Highway, which connects Damascus and Aleppo, on December 7, 2019, namely the day on which the two marketplaces in the towns of Baluon and al-Bara were bombarded, causing the death of a family, which consisted mostly of children.

On January 1, 2020, another assault targeted the Elementary School of Martyr Abdo Salameh in [the city of Sarmin](#), also reputed for being adjacent to the M5 International Highway. This attack rendered nine civilians dead, mostly women and children, in addition to injuring 15 others, some of whom had critical wounds.

These brutal assaults, carried out by the Syrian regular forces and their allies against the cities and towns of southern rural Idlib, corresponded to equally violent clashes between the forces and armed opposition groups, some of which are internationally listed as terrorist groups. This callous escalation took place a few days after the armed groups', functioning under the al-Fath al-Mubeen Operations Room,¹ declaration of the Wala Tahinu/So Do Not Be Weak battle on November 29, 2019. As the battle was waged, the armed opposition groups managed to take over the towns and villages of Iejaz, Isttablat, Sam al-Ward and Srouj in south-eastern rural Idlib at the disadvantage of the Syrian regular forces on 30 November 2019, for the latter's casualties included both arms and personnel. However, the Syrian regular forces managed to win over the towns and villages they lost on December 10, 2019, continuing to advance until they controlled the villages of Um al-Tineh, the Abandoned Division, Abu Habeh, al-Tah, Jarjanaz, al-Rafeh and al-Hraki in late December 2019, after violent confrontations with the involved armed opposition groups, which synced with other battles between the two sides on the al-Kabineh and Talet al-Hadadeen's front in rural Latakia.

The escalation is a continuation of the offensive that the Syrian regular forces and their allies initiated against the province of Idlib in April 2019, which STJ covered with a report documenting the death and injury of several civilians during hostile attacks on areas and towns in the southern rural parts of the province.²

On January 7, 2020, the United Nations/UN reported that since mid-December 2019, no less than 300,000 civilians have escaped their houses in southern Idlib due to an acute escalation of hostilities, in addition to other 1300 civilians, at least, who died due to airstrikes or shelling through May and August 2019.³

¹ Of these armed groups are Hayat Tahrir al-Sham/HTS, the National Front for Liberation/NFL and the Turkey-backed Syrian National Army.

² "Syria: Violent Airstrikes Take Toll on Civilians, including Children, in Southern Rural Idlib." STJ, September 2, 2019. Last visited: January 26, 2020. <https://stj-sy.org/en/syria-violent-airstrikes-take-toll-on-civilians-including-children-in-southern-rural-idlib/>.

³ "UN: Over 700,000 Syrians displaced from Idlib in eight months." UN January 7, 2020. Last visited: January 26, 2020. <https://news.un.org/ar/story/2020/01/1046711>.

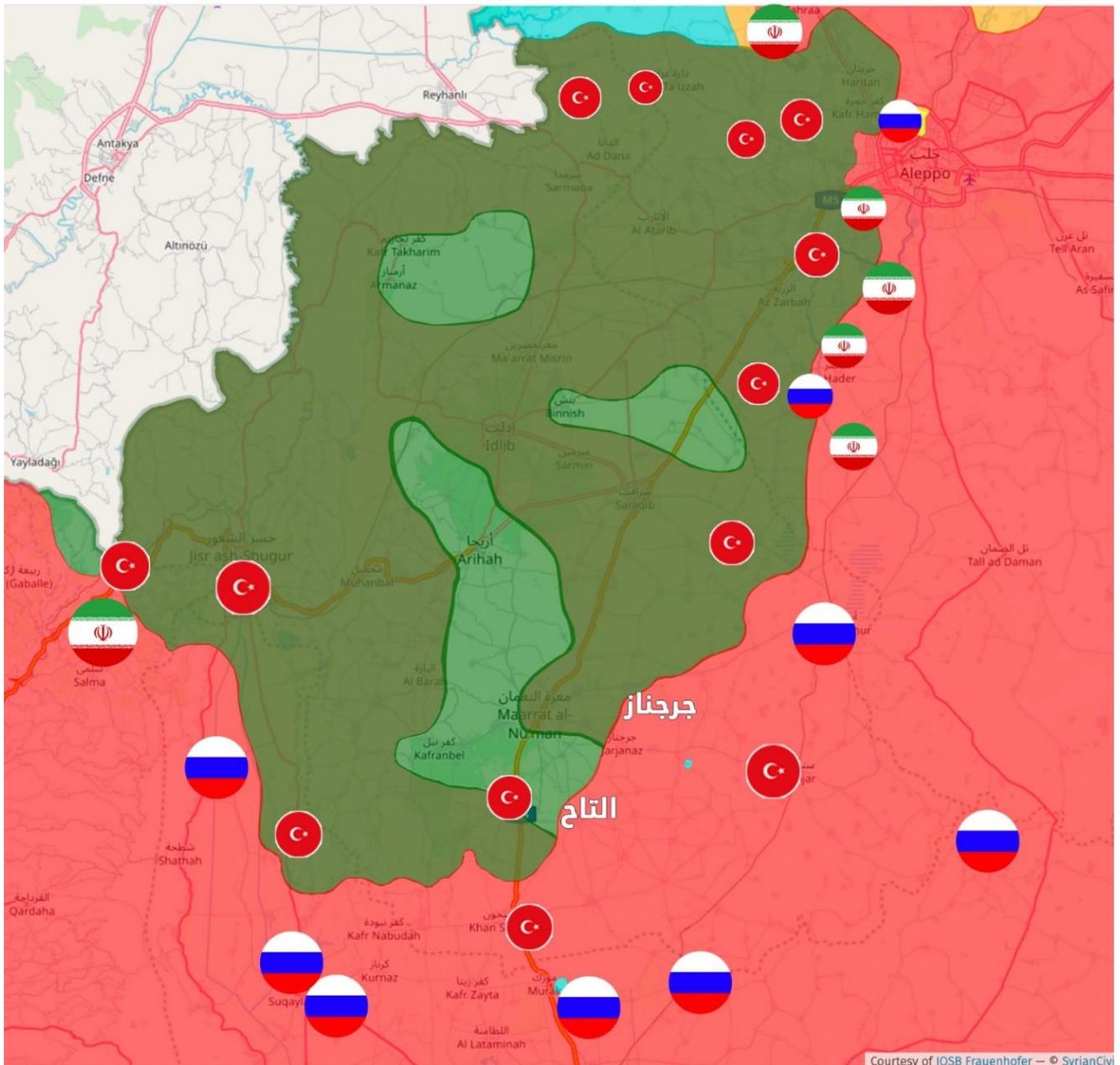


Image no. (1) – map showing the distribution of military power in the province of Idlib as far as January 9, 2020.

Report Methodology

In total, this report is based on (16) testimonies and interviews conducted with eyewitnesses either online or in person by STJ’s female researcher in the province of Idlib between early December 2019 and early January 2020, in addition to referencing numerous open sources that document the incidents mentioned here.

1. Aiming Assaults Specifically at Marketplaces as a Means to Impose Economic Restrictions on the Locals

STJ has documented four attacks on marketplaces, crowded with civilians, in the towns and villages of rural Idlib, especially those located in the southern parts of the province, near the Damascus-Aleppo International Highway, named M5. The four attacks were carried out over two days, for on December 7, 2019 alone, two violent attacks hit the marketplaces in the two towns of Baluon and al-Bara.

Two other attacks were carried out on December 2, 2019, one of which targeted a marketplace in the city of Saraqib while the other, conducted less than two hours later, aimed at the marketplace in the city of Ma`arat al-Nu`man

STJ's field researcher pointed out that the shelling that targeted the four marketplaces in rural Idlib might have been the Syrian regular forces and their allies' attempt at taking revenge, especially since the assaults took place a few days following their failure at achieving any progress on the fronts in the southern and eastern rural parts of Idlib, in addition to the casualties they were doomed to have, which included the death of personnel and the destruction of vehicles during the clashes that brought them together with armed opposition groups on the mentioned fronts.

The researcher added that the repeated targeting of marketplaces, overcrowded with civilians, in the province of Idlib had most likely sought to basically impose economic restrictions on the province's population, which resembles placing the population under a set of economic sanctions. The second derive, according to the researcher, was the attempt at evacuating the target areas of their residents and sending them on a flight of displacement in a step to claim power there, particularly in the areas located on the Damascus-Aleppo International Highway.

It was noted that the four assaults carried out on the 2nd and the 7th of December 2019 were initiated only a few days before the 14th round of the Astana Talks was held at the capital of Kazakhstan, Nur-Sultan, on December 10, 2019,⁴ which witnessed the participation of the three guarantor states, Russia, Turkey and Iran, that tackled the on-ground reality in Syria with a focus on the areas east of the Euphrates and Idlib.

⁴ "14th Round of Astana Talks on Syria Kicks off." Russia Today, December 10, 2019. Last visited: January 26, 2020. https://arabic.rt.com/middle_east/1067069-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8014-%D9%84%D9%80%D9%85%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AB%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A3%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A7-%D8%AD%D9%88%D9%84-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7/.

A. Violent Attack on a Marketplace in Baluon Town

The town of Baluon lies at the heart of Jabal al-Zawiyah, southern rural Idlib, near the M5 International Highway that connects Damascus with Aleppo. It is administratively affiliated with the district of Ihsim—13 kilometers to the north-western parts of it— and it is considered one of the areas that incubate the largest number of internally displaced persons, who sought it from the southern and eastern rural parts of Idlib and rural Hama. Today, the town is controlled by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham/HTS.

At noon, on December 7, 2019, the town was a target to aerial shelling, carried out by warplanes, believed to be Russian. The attack directly aimed at the town's marketplace, designated for clothes, which back then was overcrowded with civilians, rendering nine of them dead and leaving 12 others wounded. According to testimonies obtained by STJ from several of the town's locals, the attack has triggered fear and horror within the people, forcing them to seek refuge at safer areas. About 10% of the town's population was displaced, for the attack, according to STJ's field researcher, has possibly sought to evacuate the area of its residents, displacing them to border areas.

Details of the Attack

Around 1:54 pm, on December 7, 2019, warplanes, believed to be Russian, embarked on a raid, hitting the center of Baluon's marketplace with a missile that rendered many civilians dead, including children and women, who went to the market to purchase their needs. On this note, Ismail al-Hamadee, a relative of one of the people who died in the attack, recounted the following:

“The first raid took place around 1:45 pm, targeting the northern outskirts of the town of Baluon. Another raid was carried out with a single missile that directly hit the center of Baluon's marketplace. Due to the latter raid, my uncle's family members were all dead, including Abdo Ahmad al-Hamadee, a 85-year-old modest farmer, and Mohammad Abdo al-Hamadee, 50-year-old, along with his three children— the 13-year-old girl Aya, the 10-year-old Hassan Mohammad al-Hamadee and the 8-year-old boy Bilal Mohammad al-Hamadee. They all got killed; none of them was left but my cousin Abdo Mohammad Deeb al-Hamadee, 17-year-old, who was rushed to the hospital and is yet suffering face burns and leg-bone fractures, in addition to other problems with the urinary tract system.”

The airstrike, the eyewitnesses added, has coerced many of the town's residents to abandon it, especially since it has not been a target to bombardment for about three years.



Photo no. (2) – the victim Ahmad Abdo al-Hamadee, the uncle of the eyewitness Ismail al-Hamadee.
Photo credit: the victim's relative.



Photo no. (3) – the victim Mohammad Abdo al-Hamadee, who died in the assault, accompanied by his three children. Photo credit: the victim's relative.



Photo no. (4) – the child victim Bilal al-Hamadee. Photo credit: the victim's relative.



Photo no. (5) – the child victim Hassan al-Hamadee. Photo credit: the victim's relative.

Muddar Ahmad Shaikh Nabhan was also one of the people who lost a family member during the assault, for his father, 62-year-old Ahmad Shaikh Nabhan, died while on the way to perform prayers at a mosque near the Baluon marketplace. He narrated the following to STJ:

“When the warplanes raided the town’s marketplace, I rushed to the assault’s site to check on my father. I was taken aback upon seeing him, lying there on the ground with blood gushing out of his body. I screamed, asking him to open his eyes, but he was already dead by then. He was only 20 meters away from the airstrike’s location. Helped by a few people, I hurried to carry him to my uncle’s house, located 300 meters away from the location of the raid. We were afraid that the warplanes would return and strike again. My father went to perform the prayers, but we got him back as a dead body. This massacre has triggered a hysterical state of fear and horror among the people, driving a massive number of them to escape the town.”



Photo no. (6) – the victim Ahmad Shaikh Nabhan. Photo credit: the victim’s relative.



Photo no. (7).



Photo no. (8) – the two photos show the destruction that befell the marketplace in the town of Baluon, which was raided on December 7, 2019.

The director of the Syria Civil Defense/SCD center in Jabal al-Zawiyeh told STJ that the airstrike was initiated while the marketplace was overcrowded with women and children, as it was targeted with a highly-explosive missile, adding that the SCD teams suffered to carry out their job, especially since the warplanes kept hovering above the town, which boosted the fear that it might strike the marketplace again. The attack rendered nine civilians dead and more than 12 others injured, who were all rushed to the town's hospitals, not to mention the massive destruction caused to the shops and the Baluon High School, which was also affected by the bombing.

One of the supervisors at a warplane observatory in rural Idlib, for his part, said that the aircraft, Sukhoi Su-22, that raided the Bayluon marketplace have left the Khmeimim Air Base, Latakia Province, exactly at 1:51pm, entering the airspace of the province of Idlib towards its northern parts, where they hit the center of the town's marketplace with a missile at 1:54 sharp on reported day.



Photo no. (9).



Photo no. (10).



Photo no. (11) – the photos show the destruction that befell the marketplace in Baluon Town as effected by the airstrike on December 7, 2019. Photo credit: STJ.

STJ's field researcher managed to document the names of the civilians who died during the airstrike on the marketplace. They are:

1. The little girl Aya Mohammad al-Hamadee (13 yr.) from the town of Baluon.
2. The little boy Hassan Mohammad al-Hamadee (10 yr.) from the town of Baluon.
3. The little boy Bilal Mohammad al-Hamadee (8 yr.) from the town of Baluon.
4. Um Omar al-Humssiyeh (45 yr.), a married woman from the town of Baluon.
5. Abdo Ahmad al-Hamadee (85 yr.), a farmer from the town of Baluon.
6. Mohammad Abdo al-Hamadee (50 yr.), a farmer from the town of Baluon.
7. Ahmad Shaikh Nabhan (62 yr.), a farmer from the town of Baluon.
8. Majid Mohammad al-Abod (23 yr.), a married man from the town of Baluon.
9. Zaid Abo al-Khaish (33 yr.), a man displaced from the town of al-Fatirah, who used to work at a shop in Baluon Town's marketplace.

A [video](#), exchanged by media activists on December 7, 2019, showed the destruction that the airstrike caused to the marketplace in the town of Baluon on the same day.

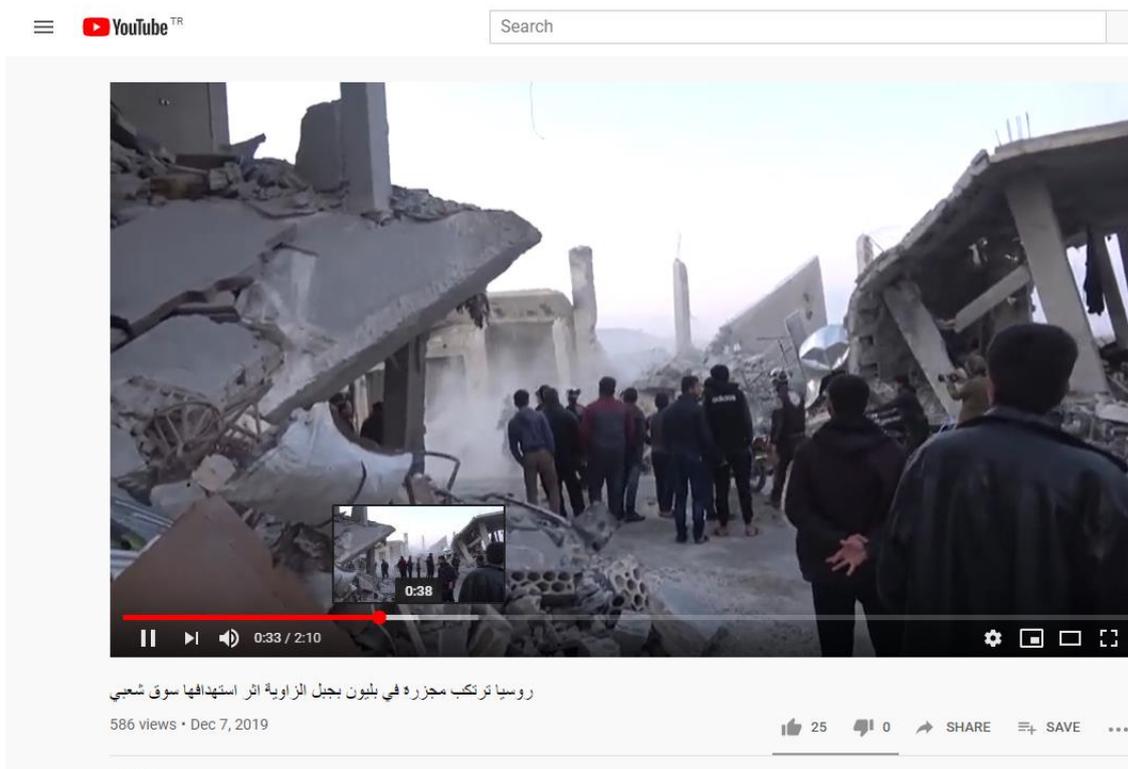


Photo no. (12) - footage taken from [the above-mentioned video](#) showing the destruction that befell the marketplace in Baluon Town as effected by the airstrike on December 7, 2019.

Another [video](#), published by media activists, shows the massive destruction that befell the marketplace in the town of Baolun, which was air raided on December 7, 2019.

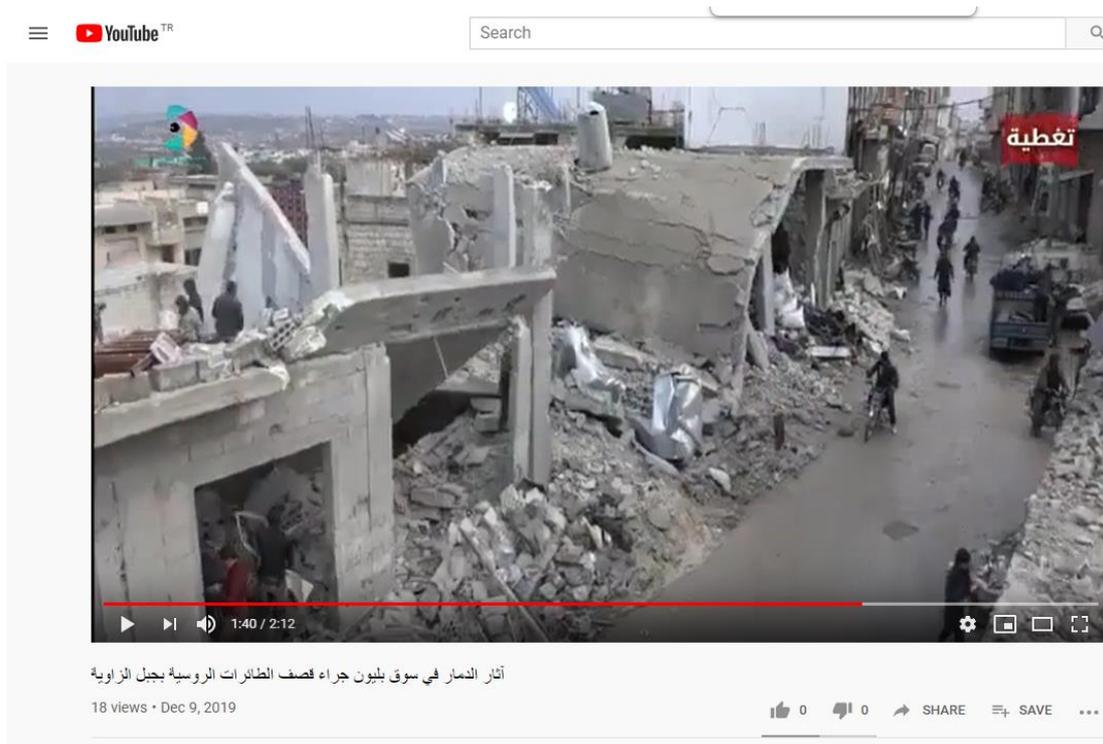


Photo no. (13) - footage taken from [the above-mentioned video](#) showing the destruction that befell the marketplace in Baluon Town as effected by the airstrike on December 7, 2019.



Photo no. (14).

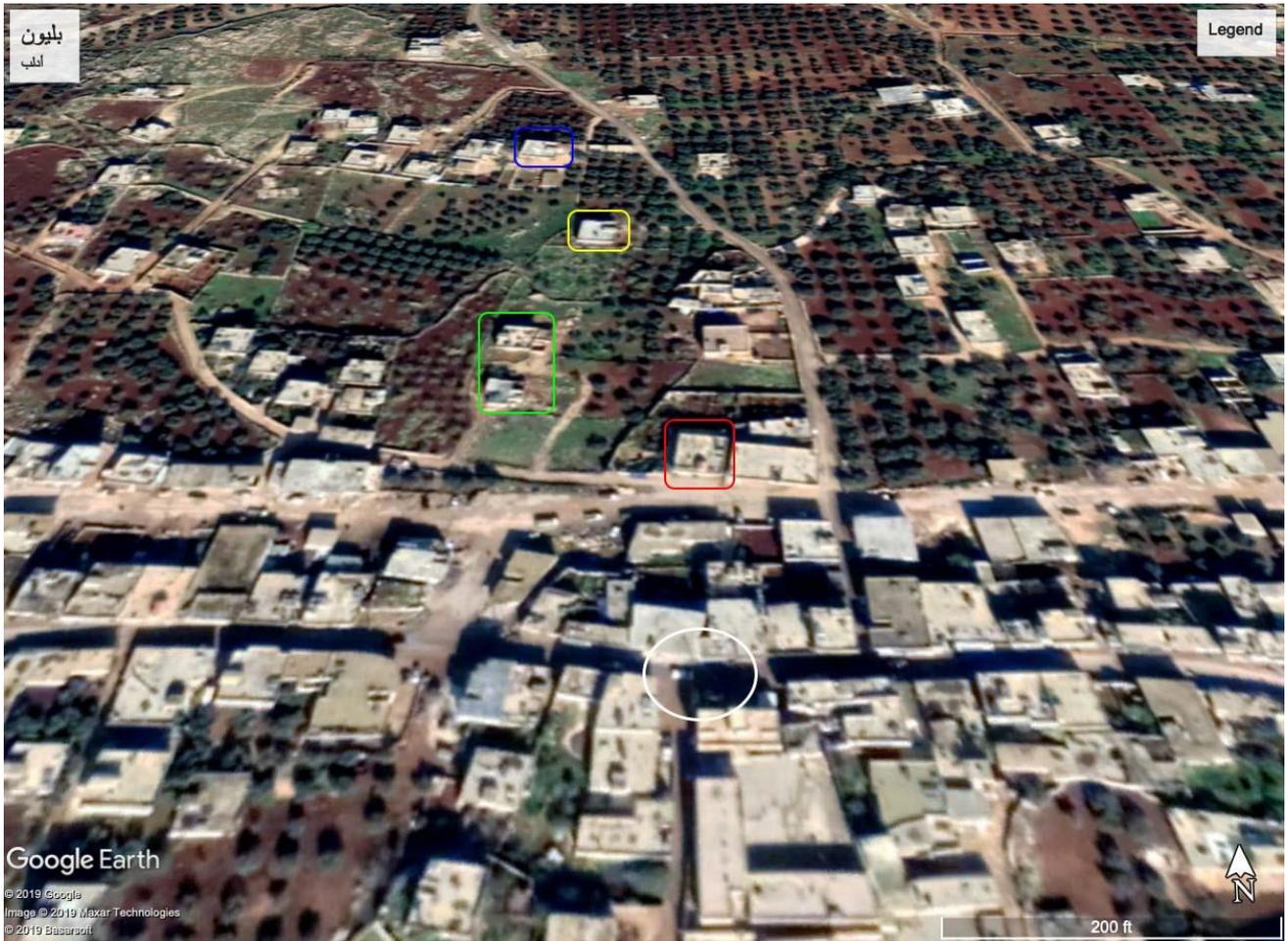


Photo no. (15).



Photo no. (16).



Photo no. (17) – analysis of visual evidence of the attack on the marketplace in the town of Baluon.

B. Attack on al-Bara Marketplace

A few hours before the attack that targeted the Baluon marketplace, a separate attack was aimed at the al-Bara Town's marketplace, designated for fruits and vegetables, which several civilian houses surround. The marketplace was hit four times in a row, rendering four civilians dead, including a child and two women, in addition to the massive destruction it caused to the houses within the vicinity of the marketplace.

The town of al-Bara, southern rural Idlib, is a home for many people displaced from the northern and western rural parts of Hama, in addition to those who fled the southern and eastern rural parts of Idlib. The town is administratively affiliated with the district of Ihsim, the center of Jabal al-Zawiyah, and is located near the M5 International Highway, connecting Damascus with Aleppo, not to mention that it is controlled by HTS. Al-Bara had a fair share of the violent military escalation that the southern and south-eastern rural parts of Idlib have born witness to, where the shelling focused on marketplaces.

Details of the Attack

On the morning of December 7, 2019, warplanes, suspected of being Russian, carried out four raids against a marketplace surrounded by civilian homes in the town of al-Bara, in sync with helicopters shelling of the marketplace which targeted it with two barrel bombs, according to a relative of one of the people who died during the incident. The relative said the following to STJ:

“Around 8:30 am, my family and I were at home and were yet asleep. We woke up to a deafening explosion in our neighborhood. I hurried to get my family out of home after massive parts of it were destroyed. The aircraft, however, hit again, targeting the same place, and my father (73 yr.) got stuck under the rubble of the bathroom. I could not rescue him. I resorted to the Syria Civil Defense Teams, hoping that they could pull him from beneath the rubble. The aircraft attacked the marketplace once again, hitting the town’s mechanical bakery this time. It then carried out the fourth raid. When the attack was over, the Civil Defense teams managed to recover my father’s body, which was totally deformed by the explosion. He was killed before my eyes, and I could not be more helpless. After we moved his body to the town’s mosque, the aircraft attacked the marketplace and the residential compound that surrounded it, striking both with two barrel bombs, which inflicted massive material damage upon the residents’ houses and shops.”



Photo no. (18).



Photo no. (19).



Photo no. (20).



Photo no. (21) – the photos show the destruction inflicted by the aerial raid upon the al-Bara's marketplace and the civilian houses in its vicinity on December 7, 2019. Photo credit: STJ.

An SDC staffer informed STJ that the teams' rescue efforts were met with several difficulties after the aircraft hit the marketplace and civilian houses in the town of al-Bara, for the aircraft have carried out four successive raids separated only by a few minutes. The staffer pointed out that when the aircraft finished the raid, a helicopter bombarded the same marketplace with a barrel bomb. Another helicopter then emerged and hit an area near the marketplace with a second barrel bomb. Other SCD staffers reported that while the teams were examining the attack's site, the checkpoints of the Syrian regular forces targeted them with four missiles, three of which landed on the town's outskirts. The fourth missile, nonetheless, ended in the same location of the first attack, namely the marketplace, destroying thus the town's mosque and mechanical bakery, in addition to the full destruction of 14 civilian homes. The attack has also rendered four civilians dead, including a child and two women, and wounded another woman and a child, who were immediately hospitalized.

A media activist, living in the town of al-Bara, told STJ that this hysterical shelling, which aimed at the town's center where the majority of the population is based has resulted in a frantic state of fear and horror among the residents and the displaced persons, forcing several of them to leave their houses and seek refuge in safer places on the Syrian-Turkish borders.

A supervisor at one of the warplane observatories in rural Idlib, for his part, said that the Sukhoi Su-22 aircraft that initiated the attack on the al-Bara Town's marketplace left the Khmeimim Air Base, Latakia Province, at 8:45 am on December 7, 2019. The aircraft then entered Idlib's airspace heading towards the north and carried out the attack on the marketplace around 8:50 am.

A video,⁵ circulated by media activists, shows the destruction effected by the shelling of the al-Bara Town's marketplace on December 7, 2019.

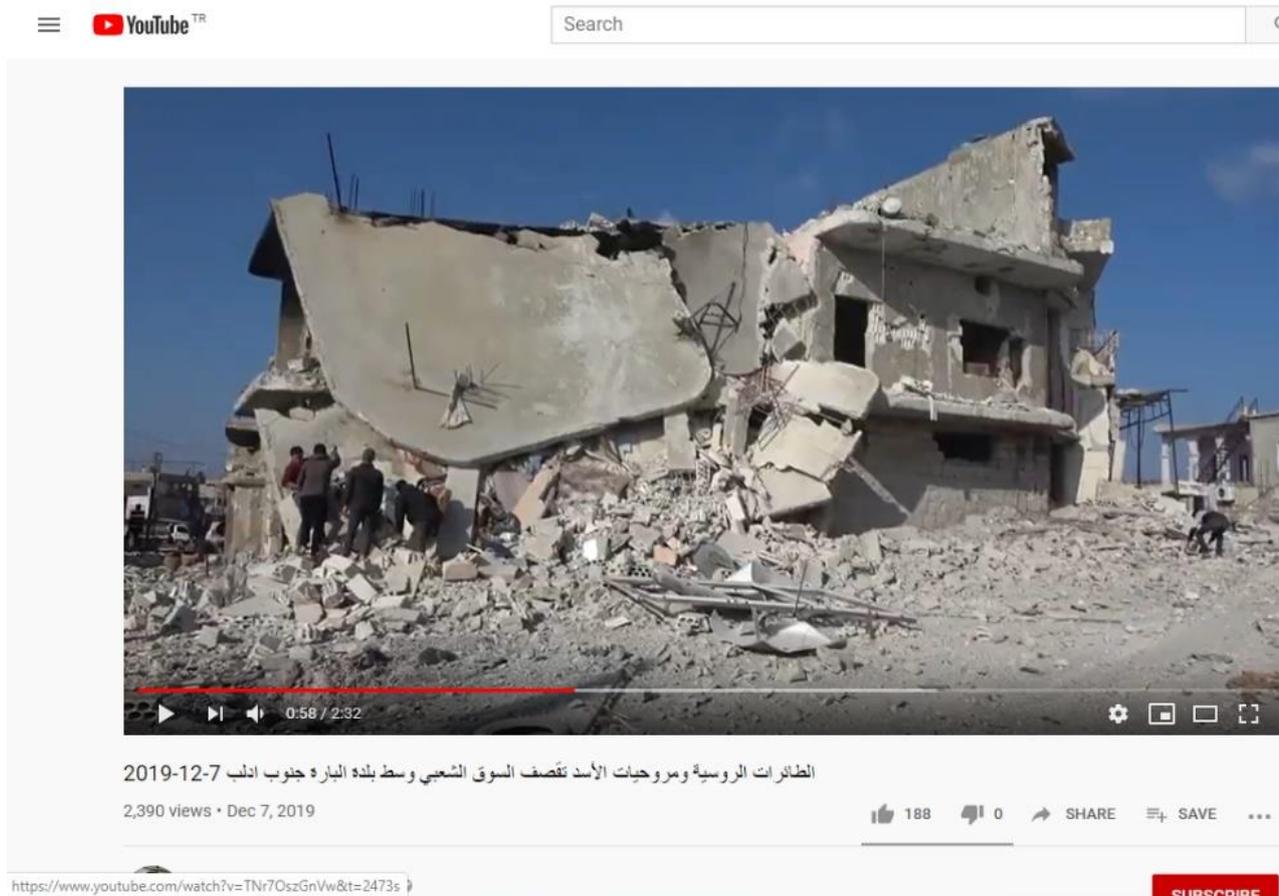


Photo no. (22)- The footage, taken from [the above-mentioned video](#), shows the massive destruction of the civilian homes and the marketplace at the town of al-Bara, caused by the airstrike on December 7, 2019.

⁵ For further information, refer to the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6m-znKFAilk&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR1a5hll3GwLjO1y4nTZe8yJzlxggwTKcW6ZGng8O0WXPkex0TtzxYwZ8v4>



Photo no. (23).



Photo no. (24) – analysis of the visual evidence of the attack aimed at the marketplace in the town of al-Bara.



Photo no. (25) – footage taken from [a video](#) published by Al Jazeera, covering the attack on the al-Bara Town.



Photo no. (26) - analysis of the visual evidence of the attack aimed at the marketplace in the town of al-Bara.

STJ's field researcher managed to document the names of the civilians rendered dead by the attack. They are:

1. The little boy Baraa Abdulhalim Qashnan (10 yr.), displaced from the town of Halfayah.
2. Khalid Haj Hmaidee (73 yr.), from the town of al-Bara, married and a father.



Photo no. (27) – the victim Khalid Haj Hmaidee prior to his death. Photo credit: the victim's relative.

3. Fttaim Hatim Sayadi (32 yr.), a woman displaced from the town of Halfayah.
4. Halimah Mohammad Qashnan (28 yr.), a woman displaced from the town of Halfayah.

C. Violent Attack on the Marketplace of Ma`arat al-Nu`man City

The two airstrikes on jammed marketplaces in the towns of rural Idlib were preceded by another attack on a marketplace, designated for fruits and vegetables, in the city of Ma'arat al-Nu'man, southern rural Idlib, on the morning of December 2, 2019. The marketplace was hit while overcrowded with civilians, which rendered nine of them dead and caused the injury of 12 others. However, this was not the first time that this marketplace gets targeted by the Syrian regular forces, for it was assaulted with a similar air raid on July 22, 2019. Back then, warplanes, suspected for being Russian, carried out a double airstrike on a marketplace in the city of Ma'arat al-Nu'man, taking a toll on dozens of civilians, who were either dead or injured.⁶

⁶ "Syria: Joint Syrian-Russian Aerial Attacks Render Dozens of Civilians Dead in Idlib." STJ, August 2, 2019. Last visited: January 28, 2020. <https://stj-sy.org/en/syria-joint-syrian-russian-aerial-attacks-render-dozens-of-civilians-dead-in-idlib/>.

The city of Ma'arat al-Nu'man is located near the M5 International Highway, connecting Damascus and Aleppo, and is controlled by HTS. The city was also a former target for military escalation on the part of the Syrian regular forces and their allies, which aimed to facilitate for the reopening and takeover of the M5 International Highway.

Details of the Attack

On the morning of December 2, 2019, the city's marketplace was made a target for the Syrian Air Force' attacks, which caused the death of nine civilians and the injury of no less than 12 others. The airstrike was carried out less than two hours on the heels of another that hit the marketplace in the city of Saraqib,⁷ where the Syrian Air Force bombarded the marketplace with two concussion missiles that downed a civilian and wounded five others.

Izo Qittaz, an eyewitness who was near the attack's location, narrated the following to STJ:

"Around 10:36 am, on the reported day, aircraft, type MiG-23, carried out assaults on the marketplace while it was overcrowded with civilians, who are used to shopping there. The warplane observatory made a radio announcement that a fighter jet has left the [T-4 Air Base](#), Homs Province. Only a few minutes later, the aircraft attacked the marketplace with four missiles in a single hit. Once the attack was over, I run towards the marketplace. There, the people's body parts could be seen everywhere around the place; a few bodies, however, were all charred. I also remember seeing a woman, whose head was split from the rest of her body. The SCD teams toiled to hospitalize the injured and put out the fires. The reconnaissance aircraft kept hovering over the area, while the people were frantic that the same place might be bombed once again."



Photo no. (28).

⁷ The city of Saraqib is controlled by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham/HTS.



Photo no. (29).



Photo no. (30).



Photo no. (31).



Photo no. (32) – the photos show the destruction inflicted by the assault on the marketplace in the city of Ma'arat al-Nu'man on December 2, 2019. Photo credit: STJ.

On the same note, Mohammad Bala'as, a media activist from the city of Ma'arat al-Nu'man, reported to STJ that the aircraft of the Syrian regular forces and their allies have the habit of raiding a place, only to return and hit it for a second and even a third time. However, when the marketplace was bombarded, the aircraft attacked it with four missiles all at once. He added:

“I was covering the attack on the marketplace in the city of Saraqib when I heard the warning of the warplane observatory through the walky-talky, that a MiG-23 fighter has left the T-4 Air Base and has already approached the airspace of the city of Ma'arat al-Nu'man, targeting the marketplace there. Less than two hours passed since it hit the Saraqib marketplace. Ma'arat al-Nu'man's marketplace is one of the most crowded with civilians. The violent attack resulted in the death of about nine civilians, women included. The SCD teams, for their part, had a difficult time recovering dead bodies, especially because the reconnaissance aircraft never separated with the city's airspace, triggering a state of horror that the marketplace might be bombarded again.”



Photo no. (33).



Photo no. (34) - The two photos show the remnants of the missiles used in the shelling of the marketplace in the city of Ma'arat al-Nu'man on December 2, 2019. Photo credit: STJ.

A supervisor at one of the warplane observatories in the province of Idlib told STJ that an aircraft, MiG-23, has kicked off the T-4 Air Base, Homs Province, exactly at 10:30 am and entered the province's airspace at 10:35 am, where it hit the marketplace in the city of Ma'arat al-Nu'man with four corresponding missiles at 10:36 am.

A video,⁸ posted by a media center, showed the destruction that befell the city's marketplace and the bodies of the people being recovered by the SCD teams following the air raid on December 2, 2019.

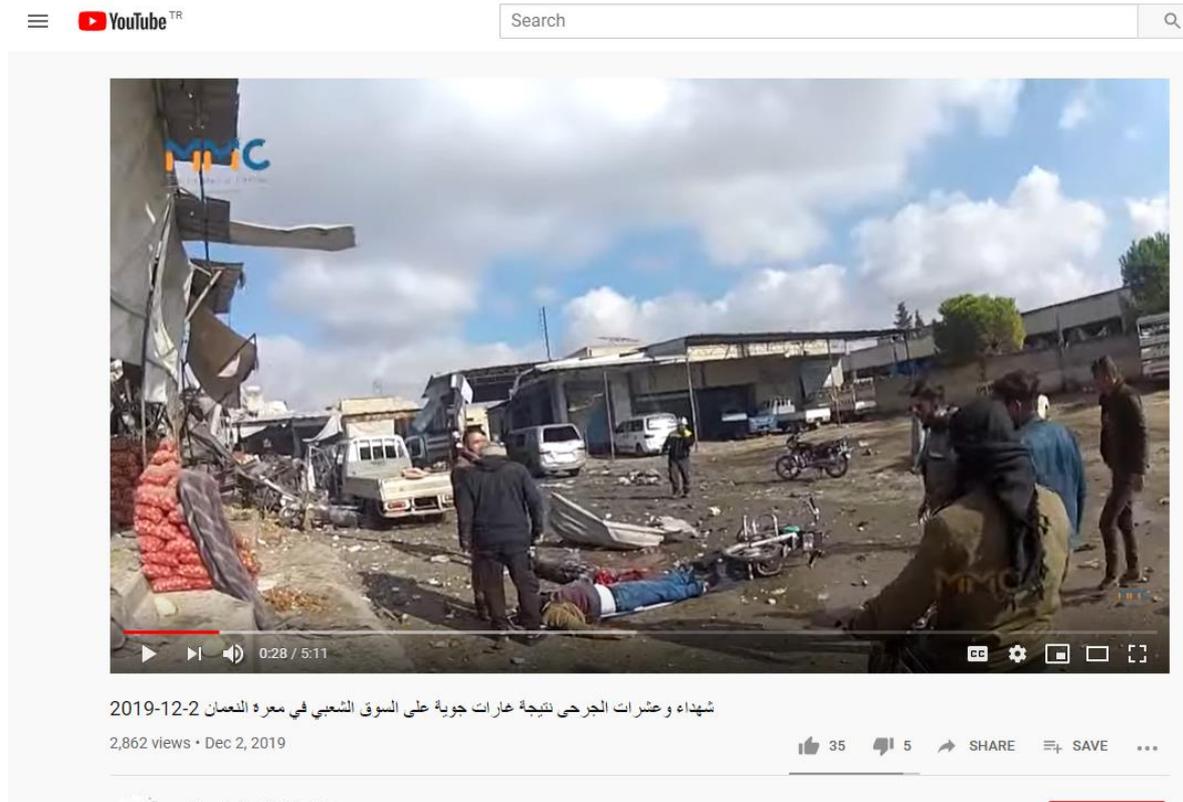


Photo no. (35) – The footage, taken from [the above-mentioned video](#), shows the recovery of the body of one of the victims who died in the airstrike on the marketplace in the city of Ma'arat al-Nu'man.

⁸ For further information, refer to the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ForRXrdK-s>.



Photo no. (36).



Photo no. (37).



Photo no. (38).



Photo no. (39)- analysis of the visual evidence of the assault on the marketplace in the city of Ma'arat al-Nu'man.

STJ's field researcher managed to document the names of the civilians who died in the attack. They are:

1. Naser Darfeel (27 yr.), a married man from the city of Ma'arat al-Nu'man, who used to work in a vegetables shop at the marketplace.



Photo no. (40) – the victim Naser Darfeel prior to his death. Photo credit: Media activists.

2. Jamilah al-Youssef (37 yr.), a married woman displaced to the city of Ma'arat al-Nu'man from al-Dair al-Sharqi.
3. Maryam al-Youssef (40 yr.), a married woman displaced to the city of Ma'arat al-Nu'man from al-Dair al-Sharqi.
4. Abdulhameed Subaie (27 yr.), a married man from the city of Ma'arat al-Nu'man.
5. Hassan Sulaiman al-Rashid, a man displaced to the city of Ma'arat al-Nu'man from the town of Kafrbasin.



Photo no. (41) – the victim Hassan Sulaiman al-Rashid prior to his death. Photo credit: Media activists.

6. Ahmad Salameh (40 yr.), displaced to the city of Ma'arat al-Nu'man from the town of al-Dair al-Sharqi.
7. Abdulkhaliq Hmaidee (46 yr.), a married man from the city of Ma'arat al-Nu'man, who used to work at a fruits shop in the marketplace.



Photo no. (42) – the victim Abdulkhaliq Hamidee prior to his death. Photo credit: Media activists.

8. Abdo al-Adel (30 yr.), a married man from the city of Ma'arat al-Nu'man, who used to work at a shop in the marketplace.
9. Jihad Barq (19 yr.), born in the city of Ma'arat al-Nu'man.

2. Children Dead in Different Assaults on Towns in Rural Idlib

In addition to the attacks that targeted four marketplaces in villages and towns in southern rural Idlib, STJ has monitored two additional attacks, one hit a house belonging to a civilian based in the town of Abadita, near the M5 International Highway between Damascus and Aleppo. This attack rendered a whole family dead on December 7, 2019—the same day on which the two marketplaces in the towns of Baluon and al-Bara were raided.

The military escalation did not subside as 2019 drew to an end, for on January 1, 2020, another attack was carried out, killing six children and two women, where a cluster bomb-filled missile was deployed to hit the Martyr Abdo Salameh School in the city of Sarmin, southern rural Idlib, in addition to the main market and the marketplace in the town.

The two attacks triggered massive numbers of people to leave their houses, seeking shelter in safer areas. This wave of displacement, according to STJ's field researcher, aims to evacuate the areas near the M5 International Highway in a step to take them over.

A. Attack on a Civilian Home Renders a Whole Family Dead in Abadita Town

The town of Abadita, southern rural Idlib, also had a share of the military escalation initiated by the Syrian regular forces and their allies on December 7, 2019. The town, a home for 3000 persons and a 100 families, displaced from southern rural Idlib, was a target to a barrel bomb which hit a house belonging to a civilian. The attack caused the death of five civilians, most of whom were children. The town of Abadita is administratively associated with Ihsim District, located in the center of Jabal al-Zawiyeh. The reason to its shelling, according to STJ's field researcher, might be its proximity to the Damascus-Aleppo International Highway.

Around 11:15 am, on December 7, 2019, the helicopters of the Syrian Air Force threw two barrel bombs on a civilian home in the town, belonging to a man called Ali Mohammad al-Zaidan. The explosion destroyed the house completely and rendered several children dead, who were at home with their mother and cousins, according to an eyewitness, who was near the attack's site. He told STJ the following:

“Four children died in the bombing, another died affected by his wounds after he was rushed to a hospital in Turkey. The latter child was only a year and a half old. The attack has also caused the injury of four other persons, who also got hospitalized. The SCD teams had a difficult time recovering the bodies of the victims, stuck under the rubble and between debris.”

The attack on the civilian home in the town of Abadita sent several of the town's residents on a flight of displacement, as they sought refuge in less-bombarded areas. STJ's field researcher pointed out that the military escalation witnessed by a number of towns in southern rural Idlib on December 7, 2019, might have been a vengeful reaction to the losses inflicted upon the Syrian regular forces on the fronts of southern and eastern rural Idlib, which included both the death of troops and the loss of vehicles and weapons.

Haytham al-Hamoud, a member of the Abadita Town Local Council, told STJ that Abadita is a small town, where residents work in farming and a small number of displaced persons live. The town has already been a site to violent bombardment, which rendered several civilians dead, triggering the people to leave it until the village regained its stability. The situation remained thus till the warplanes observatory reported that a helicopter has left the Hama Air Base and headed to the town's airspace, where it threw two barrel bombs on its center. One bomb landed on the house of Ali Mohammad al-Zaidan, who was at home with his three children and his sister-in-law.

A supervisor of the warplane observatory in the province of Idlib reported that the helicopters that carried out the assault on the town of Abadita has kicked off from the [Hama Air Base](#) at 11:00 pm and entered the province's airspace heading north. There, the helicopters raided the town of Ihsim at about 11:10 am. Five minutes later, the helicopters embarked on a second assault, hitting the house of a civilian in the town of Abadita at 11:15 am.

STJ's field researcher managed to document the names of the civilians who died as a result of the attack. They are:

1. The little girl Sundus Ghayath al-Zaidan, a year and two months old girl, born in the town of Abadita.
2. The little girl Zaynab Ghayath al-Zaidan (8 yr.), born in the town of Abadita.



Photo no. (43) – the two child victims Sundus and Zaynab al-Zaidan prior to their death in the shelling aimed at the town of Abadita on December 7, 2019. Photo credit: Victims' relative.



Photo no. (44) – the dead little girl Sundus al-Zaidan. Photo credit: Media activists.



Photo no. (45) – the dead little girl Zaynab al-Zaidan. Photo credit: Media activists.

3. The little girl Nour Ali al-Zaidan (15 yr.), from the town of Abadita.
4. The little girl Iman Ali al-Zaidan (11 yr.), from the town of Abadita.

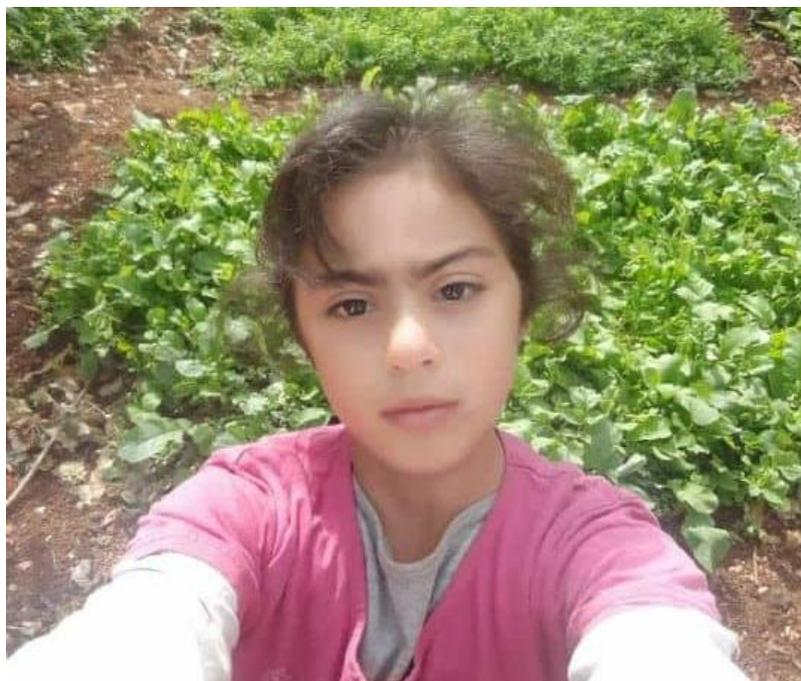


Photo no. (46) – the little girl Iman al-Zaidan prior to her death. Photo credit: The victim's relative.



Photo no. (47) – the dead little girl Iman al-Zaidan. Photo credit: Media activists.

5. The little boy Abdullah Ali al-Zaidan (3 yr.), from the town of Abadita.



Photo no. (46) – the little boy Abdullah al-Zaidan prior to his death. Photo credit: The victim's relative.



Photo no. (49) – the little boy Abdullah al-Zaidan dead affected by his wounds. Photo credit: A relative of the child.

6. Walaa al-Jazzar (28 yr.), a married young woman from the town of Abadita.

B. Attack on Elementary School Renders Two Children and Two Women Dead in Sarmin City

The violent military escalation on the part of the Syrian regular forces and their allies continued to early 2020. On January 1, cluster bombs-filled missiles were deployed in the shelling of the Elementary School of Martyr Abdo Salameh in the city of Sarmin, southern rural Idlib, in addition to the city's marketplace. The shelling took a toll on nine civilians, most of whom were children and women, and injured 15 others, a number of whom had critical wounds and were hospitalized to Turkey. The city of Sarmin is one of the areas crowded with people displaced from the city of Ma'arat al-Nu'man, its countryside and the north-western rural parts of Hama. It is most known for its location, as it is adjacent to the international highway between Damascus and Aleppo, namely M5.

Details of the Attack

At noon, around 11:43 am, the school and the marketplace in the city of Sarmin were both bombarded with a cluster bombs-filled missile. Commenting on this, an eyewitness who was near the attack's site, told STJ the following:

“When I arrived in the attack's site, the scene was difficult to describe, the bodies of dead children were laying on the ground and their blood spelled over school bags. I

remember that one of the children has got his arm mutilated. The female teachers were either dead or critically wounded. This attack might have rendered more persons dead, if the school principal had not sent the students home ten minutes before the school's leaving hour. There was a building without cladding near the house, where a number of displaced persons resided. There, on the first floor of the building, an impoverished family displaced from Ma'arat al-Nu'man was staying. While the wife was making lunch, a shrapnel reached the kitchen and hit the gas cylinder, causing the woman's death, as she was affected by her severe burns."



Photo no. (50) – the gate of Martyr Abdo Salameh School following its bombardment on January 1, 2020. Photo credit: Sarmin City Local Council.

Hussam Wazaz, the director of the local council in the city of Sarmin, told STJ that the Martyr Abdo Salameh School also included a kindergarten. The attack, thus, caused the death of five children, two women and two men, in addition to 15 others who were injured and were hospitalized, for some of them had critical wounds. Wazaz added that the missile used in the attack was a Tochka fixed on a vehicle, pointing out that the city's airspace back then was completely empty of warplanes.

On the same note, a Sarmin-based media activist, told STJ that some of the cluster bombs deployed in the attack did not explode, which forced several of the city's people to abandon it until they were removed. He remarked that the container that held the missile was very big, with an empty space of about 7 meters. He pointed out that the missile was launched by the Syrian regular forces' checkpoints set up in the Azan Mount in southern rural Aleppo.



Photo no. (51) – the remnants of the cluster bombs-filled-missile, used to bombard the school and the marketplace in the city of Sarmin. Photo credit: The city's local council.

STJ's field researcher managed to document the names of the civilians who died as a result of the attack. They are:

1. The little boy Yahia Raed Sarmini (6 yr.), from the city of Sarmin.



Photo no. (52) – the little boy Yahia Sarmini prior to his death. Photo credit: Local activists.

2. The little boy Mohammad Abdulfatah al-Shatter (11 yr.), from the city of Sarmin.
3. The little boy Abdulqader Shakoul (9 yr.), from the city of Sarmin.



Photo no. (53) – the little boy Abdulqader Shakoul prior to his death. Photo credit: Local activists.

4. The little girl Hour Sarjawee (6 yr.), from the city of Ma'arat al-Nu'man.



Photo no. (54) – the little girl Hour Sarjawee prior to her death. Photo credit: Local activists.

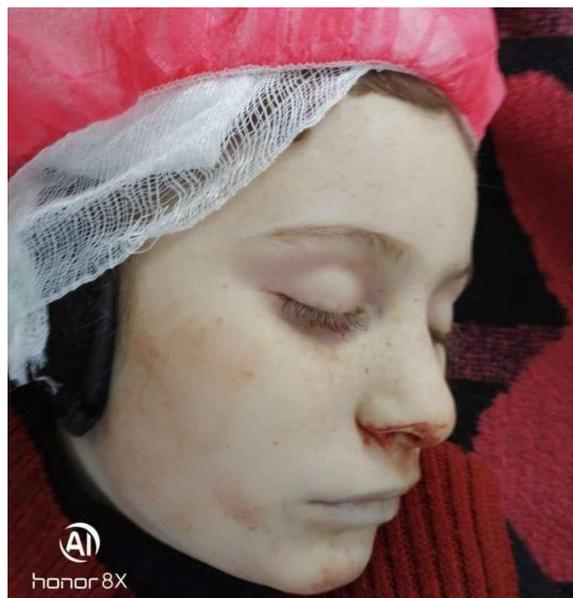
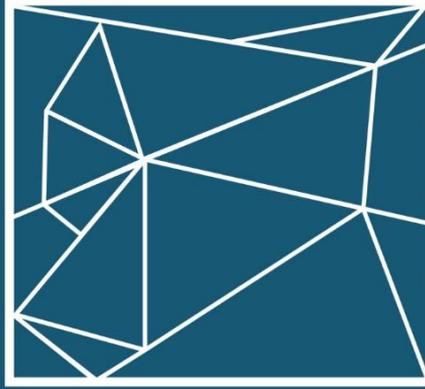


Photo no. (55) – the dead little girl Hour Sarjawee. Photo credit: Local activists.

5. The little boy Ali Natheer Muteb (13 yr.), from the city of Sarmin.
6. The wife of Abdulrahman Dibo Aref (26 yr.), a mother of three from the city of Ma'arat al-Nu'man.
7. The teacher Fatimah Abdo Ghazal (40 yr.), from the city of Sarmin.
8. Abdulaziz Eid (28 yr.), from the city of Sarmin.
9. Mohammad Bassass (33 yr.), a father of six from the city of Ma'arat al-Nu'man.

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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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