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Southern Syria: A New Wave of Violence Strikes Daraa

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Executive Summary

Daraa [province](#), south of Syria, continues to be gripped by security chaos, leading to assassinations and other violent incidents. These incidents occurred almost daily throughout the period covered in this report, between early April and late December 2020. They included both direct and indirect assassinations. In some cases, individuals were killed by explosive devices, during clashes, and in attacks on security services' centers and checkpoints.

The violent attacks were aimed at both civilians and militants, including former fighters and high-profile commanders of armed opposition groups who signed settlement/reconciliation agreements with the Syrian government, as well as militants affiliated with the Syrian regular forces. Other attacks targeted individuals tied to Iranian militias or Russian forces in the region, members of local political parties affiliated with the Syrian government, Central Reconciliation Committee in Daraa (CRC) delegates, and municipality directors.

Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) recorded over 370 assassinations and attacks throughout the period covered occurring in different areas across Daraa province.

Together, these assassinations and attacks resulted in the deaths of at least 202 individuals. The majority of these individuals were former commanders and fighters for the Syrian armed opposition and signatories to the settlement agreement with the Syrian government—including those who subsequently joined the Syrian regular forces, and others who refused to fight for the Syrian government.

STJ recorded the death of 102 former fighters for armed opposition groups, making up over 50% of the reported assassinations, at least 78 militants of the Syrian regular forces, making up nearly 38% of the reported assassinations, and 23 fighters of the Russia-formed 5th Legion,¹ making up 11% of the reported assassinations.

The greatest percentage of assassinations and attacks occurred in Daraa's western countryside, where STJ's field researcher reported there are still large numbers of former armed opposition fighters with light weaponry. In the eastern countryside, where a large number of Syrian regular forces and Iranian militias are positioned, similar, but less, assassinations and attacks occurred.

In Daraa's western countryside, assassinations and attacks were carried out mostly in Daraa al-Balad, city of Daraa, Muzayrib, and Masaken Jleen, as well as in Nawa, Jasim, Dael, Tafas, Ain Zikr, Sahem el-Golan, al-Shajarah, among other places. Sporadic incidents of violence also occurred in the towns of Inkhil, al-Sanamayn, and Muthabin in Daraa's northern countryside. In Daraa's eastern countryside, assassinations and attacks occurred in the cities and towns of Umm al-Mayadin, Giza, Busra al-Sham, al-Harak, al-Soura, al-Lajat, Umm

¹ The 5th Legion consists of a number of former armed opposition groups; it was established by Russia, which brought these groups together after they signed a settlement agreement with the Syrian government. The legion is led by Ahmad al-Awdeh.

Walad, Mhajjah, Karak, Nahata, al-Maliha al-Sharqiya, Basr al-Harir, al-Sahwa, al-Taibeh, Naseeb, Saida, Musayfrah, Kiheel, Maaraba, and al-Ghariya al-Sharqiya.

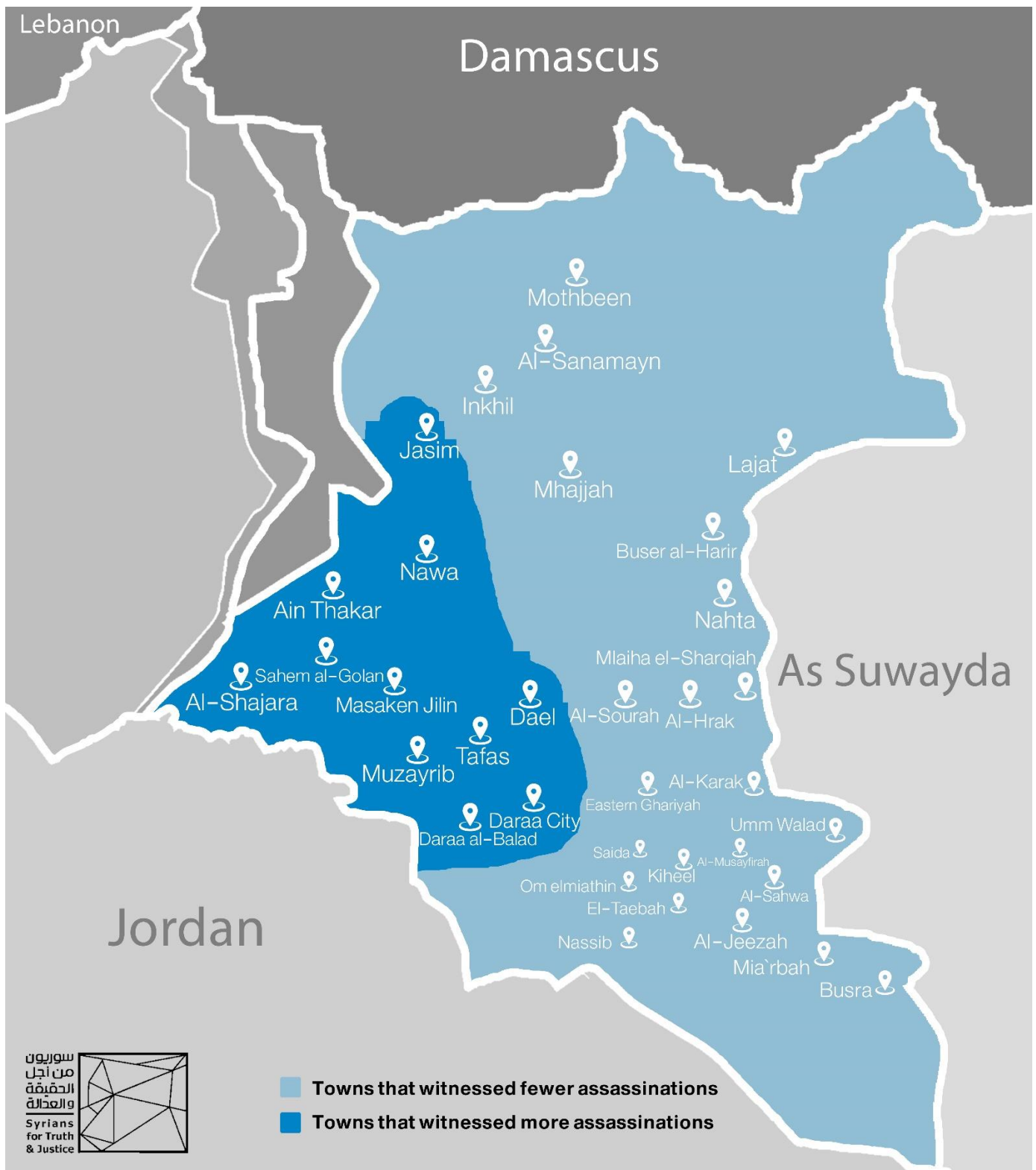


Image 1—A map showing the towns and cities where violence spiked between April and late November 2020, particularly in the western countryside of Daraa where a large number of former armed opposition fighters remain.

The perpetrators used several methods to carry out the reported assassinations and attacks. In some cases, the targets were shot or died in explosive device detonations. In other cases, unidentified gunmen shot the targeted individuals and escaped, riding motorcycles or cars without registration plates.

Additionally, during the period reported, STJ's field researchers monitored an increase in the number of assassinations aimed at high-profile personalities in Daraa province. Some of these individuals were members of the CRC in Daraa, including Adham Al-Krad, a former key commander of the armed opposition groups. Al-Krad signed a settlement agreement with the Syrian government and subsequently became a member of the CRC, and Muhammad Jamal al-Jalm, who went by the *nom de guerre* Abu al-Baraa. Al-Jalm was also a member of the CRC. He once worked as a judge at the Dar al-Adel Court in Horan and had signed a settlement agreement with the Syrian government.

Violence in southern Syria corresponds to the Iranian-Russian dispute, for Moscow and Tehran each have projects in the region and are constantly competing to expand their influence and control over areas.² In a former report, published on 1 May 2020, STJ documented the alarming increase in the number of assassinations, kidnappings, and attacks on government security centers in Daraa province. The report recorded at least 200 assassinations and attacks between December 2019 and late March 2020 against personalities affiliated with the Syrian government or its security services.³

1. Assassinations of Former Armed Opposition Group Key Commanders and Fighters

STJ documented the death of 120 former armed opposition fighters. Some of these individuals, dubbed Group A in this report, signed a settlement agreement with the Syrian government and subsequently joined the ranks of its forces. Others, referred to as Group B in this report, signed an agreement but refused to fight and stood on the sidelines. Of the first group, 44 were killed; of the second, 58. Of the total assassinations and attacks covered in this report, over 50% were aimed at these fighters.

A. Group A Documented Deaths

1. On 4 April 2020, Muhammad Khalil Issa al-Hajji died in a drive-by shooting. Unidentified gunmen riding a motorcycle shot al-Hajji in Jasim city, north of Daraa. Al-Hajji was a former commander of the Jaysh al-Ababil/al-Ababil Army, a former armed opposition group that operated in Daraa. He signed a settlement agreement in 2018 and then volunteered with the State Security Service.

² "Conflicting Iranian-Russian Expediencies in southern Syria Threaten the Social Fabric," STJ, 1 July 2020, <https://stj-sy.org/en/conflicting-iranian-russian-expediencies-in-southern-syria-threaten-the-social-fabric/> (last visited: 8 February 2021)

³ "Fresh Wave of Violence Storms Already Vulnerable 'Settlement Agreement in Daraa,'" STJ, 1 May 2020, <https://stj-sy.org/en/fresh-wave-of-violence-storms-already-vulnerable-settlement-agreement-in-daraa/> (last visited: 8 February 2021)

2. On 24 June 2020, Bassel Kamal al-Masalmeh was shot and killed by unidentified gunmen where he lived in Daraa al-Balad. Al-Masalmeh was a former fighter of the armed opposition groups. He signed a settlement agreement and later joined the Military Security Service.
3. On 20 December 2020, Fadi al-Attalah al-Qara'an, nicknamed Khnaifees, was shot and killed by unidentified gunmen in Muzayrib town in Daraa's western countryside — one of the province's most violent areas because it houses a significant number of former armed opposition fighters. Al-Qara'an was a former fighter for armed opposition groups. He signed a settlement agreement and later joined the 4th Division.

B. Group B Documented Deaths

1. On 4 April 2020, unidentified gunmen riding a motorcycle shot and killed Hussain Rashid Masalmeh, from the al-Shayah area, near Daraa al-Balad, where there are a large number of former armed opposition fighters. Masalmeh previously fought for the armed opposition and signed a settlement agreement with the Syrian government.
2. On 20 August 2020, unidentified persons shot Abdulhadi Awad al-Dahi, who later died of his wounds. The unknown perpetrators chased and shot al-Dhai as he rode a motorcycle near Lake Muzayrib in Muzayrib town, west of Daraa. Al-Dahi was a former armed opposition fighter.
3. On 14 October 2020, one of the area's most violent assassinations since the settlement agreement was instituted occurred. The target was Adham Muhammad al-Krad, a former commander of the armed opposition groups and a member of the province's CRC.

Four other commanders were killed that day, all having previously signed a settlement agreement with the Syrian government. Ratib Ahmad al-Krad, Ahmad Faysal al-Mahamid, Adnan al-Da'as al-Masalmeh, and Muhammad Najah Zai'm al-Dghail were assassinated near Muthabin town, north of Daraa, where there are large numbers of Syrian regular forces and Iranian militia fighters.

Al-Krad and the four other commanders were returning from Damascus after negotiating with the Syrian government. An unidentified car blocked their way then shot at the commanders' car with machine guns. The car caught fire and all five passengers died, local sources reported to STJ.

Al-Krad was a constant target for assassinations. He won popular support after demanding that Russian forces put an end to human rights violations and security attacks in Daraa city by the Syrian government. He also asked the Syrian government to ease security restrictions in Daraa, threatening to "reignite the protests and the revolution in Daraa." Al-Krad had a disagreement with Brigadier-General Louay al-Ali, director of the Military Security Service in Daraa, because he refused to join al-Ali's forces.



Image 2—Photo of Adham al-Krad, a former commander of the armed opposition, before his assassination. Credit: Local Facebook pages.



Image 3—A photo of the car in which five former commanders of the armed opposition were assassinated after being attacked by unidentified gunmen. Credit: Media activists.

4. On 11 November 2020, unidentified gunmen shot and killed Fadi Marzouk al-Shar'a in the al-Lajat region, east of Daraa, where there are large numbers of Syrian regular forces and Iranian militia fighters. Al-Shar'a was a former commander of the armed opposition and was assassinated somewhere between Tybnah and Mhajjah towns on the Daraa-Damascus highway. Al-Shar'a signed a settlement agreement with the Syrian government.

Additionally, in Daraa's western countryside, several former armed opposition fighters who signed settlement agreements with the Syrian government were shot and killed by unidentified perpetrators.

1. On 19 September 2020, unidentified gunmen shot and killed Muhammad Ahmad Masalmeh in Daraa al-Balad, his birthplace.
2. On 17 September 2020, Abu Abdo al-Jahmani, nicknamed Abu Abdo al-Salameh, was assassinated in Nawa city.
3. On 22 August 2020, Omar Nasser Masalmeh was assassinated.
4. On 22 September 2020, Mahmoud Farhan al-Zubi was assassinated in Tafas city.
5. On 12 October 2020, Muhammad Abdurrahman Shitaiwee al-Jisr was assassinated in Jillen town, west of Daraa.

In addition to those listed, many others were assassinated by unidentified individuals — all after previously signing settlement agreements with the Syrian government and refusing to fight for the Syrian regular forces.

2. Assassinations of Military, Security, and Political Figures Affiliated with the Syrian Government

STJ documented the deaths of at least 78 individuals who worked for the Syrian government, making up 38% of the assassinations perpetrated between April 2020 and late December 2020.

The assassinations targeted nine members of the local police service, 39 officers and militants of the Syrian regular army, 19 members and volunteer recruits of the Syrian security services and other paramilitary formations of the Syrian government, as well as 11 politicians and administrative figures in the province.

c. Local Police Personnel Assassinations

1. On 4 May 2020, an armed group led by Muhammad Qasim al-Sbaihi, nicknamed Abu Tarik, a former armed opposition fighter who had signed a settlement agreement with the Syrian government, kidnapped nine members of the Muzayrib District Police Station. All nine were executed, local sources reported to STJ.

The execution was purportedly a retaliatory act against Syrian regular forces after they accused al-Sbaihi of being behind the kidnapping and murder of his own son, Shuj'a Qasim

al-Sbaihi, and relative, Muhammad Ahmad Mousa al-Sbaihi, a few days before the police personnel were kidnapped.

The two murdered men were former armed opposition fighters who signed settlement agreements with the Syrian government. Their bodies were found on the road between Jueileh-Ibtta villages, central rural parts of Daraa province. Following the murder of the two men, groups affiliated with the reconciled factions in the western region blamed Muhammad Qasim al-Sbaihi and set his house on fire.

D. Attacks on Syrian Regular Army Officers and Recruits

Throughout the period covered in this report, STJ monitored extensive attacks against officers and recruits of the Syrian regular army, documenting the death of over 10 officers and more than 27 recruits who were attacked separately across different parts of Daraa province.

1. On 17 April 2020, unidentified gunmen shot and killed Hussain Fawaz Ramadan near Khirbet Qeis village, west of Daraa, where there are large numbers of former armed opposition fighters.
2. On 18 April 2020, less than 24 hours after the assassination on the previous day, unidentified persons shot at the car of two officers of the 52nd Mechanized Brigade, near the al-Harak town, east of Daraa, where there are large numbers of Syrian regular forces and Iranian militia fighters. The two officers were killed.
3. On 18 May 2020, Lieutenant Anass Ihssan Kiwan of the 15th Special Forces Division was shot and killed by unidentified gunmen riding a motorcycle on the outskirts of al-Sahwa town, east of Daraa, where there are large numbers of Syrian regular forces and Iranian militia fighters.
4. On 10 September 2020, unidentified gunmen riding a motorcycle shot and killed Talal Qasim, Brigadier General of the 5th Division, on the road between Basr al-Harir-Nahtah towns, west of Daraa, where there are large numbers of Syrian regular forces and Iranian militia fighters.
5. On 12 September 2020, unidentified gunmen riding a motorcycle shot and killed Hisham Hussain al-Fajer, Warrant Officer of the Syrian regular army, and recruit Hussain Hassan al-Dahouk in the al-Sheikh Maskin city, central Daraa, where there are large numbers of Syrian regular forces.
6. On 31 December 2020, unidentified gunmen attacked a 4th Division military vehicle on the Sahem el-Golan-Tasil road, west of Daraa, where there are large numbers of former armed opposition fighters. The attack killed Lieutenant Colonel Fidaa Mahfouz, of the 641st Battalion of the 4th Division, along with four militants who were former armed opposition fighters. The four had signed a settlement agreement with the Syrian government and later joined the ranks of the 4th Division.

E. Attacks on Security Services' Personnel and Volunteer Recruits

Several Syrian security services operate in Daraa province, most notably the Military Security Service, known for its close ties with Iranian Militias and the Lebanese Hezbollah, the State Security service, also known for maintaining similar relationships with Iranian Militias and Hezbollah, and the 4th Division. STJ's field researcher documented 19 assassinations, most which targeted Military Security personnel.

1. On 19 May 2020, unidentified gunmen assassinated Thaer al-Abbas in Sanamayn city, where there are large numbers of Syrian regular forces and Iranian militia fighters. Al-Abbas served as a high-profile commander of the Military Security Service's formations in Sanamayn city. He was shot on the al-Souq Street in the city and suffered serious injuries, later dying at the Sanamayn Military Hospital.



Image 4—Photo of Thaer al-Abbas, a prominent commander of the Military Security Service in al-Sanamayn city. Credit: Local Facebook pages.

2. On 10 April 2020, unidentified gunmen shot Muhammad Bassam al-Mutlak, a militant of the Air Force Intelligence, while leaving his home in Muzayrib town, west of Daraa, where there are large numbers of former armed opposition fighters. Al-Mutlak died and a member of his family wounded.
3. On 29 June 2020, unidentified gunmen shot Sharif al-Nazal, director of the Military Security Detachment in Sahem el-Golan village, west of Daraa, where there are large numbers of former armed opposition fighters. During the shooting, al-Nazal was accompanied by an officer of the Syrian regular army. Al-Nazal died and the officer was injured.

4. On 5 July 2020, unidentified persons shot a vehicle transporting militants of the 4th Division, killing Hussam Dahbour and Ahmad Nouri, and seriously injuring Raqi Suleiman. The vehicle was targeted on the Gharaz road, near Daraa city, where there are large numbers of former armed opposition fighters.
5. On 2 September 2020, unidentified individuals shot Ali Ibrahim, a lieutenant of the Military Security Service-Department of Studies, in Nawa city, near the Imam Nawawī Cemetery, west of Daraa, where there are large numbers of former armed opposition fighters. Ali, nicknamed Abu Haider, died.
6. Assassinations were also aimed at members of the General Intelligence Directorate. On 11 September 2020, unidentified persons shot and killed Muhammad Salah, a lieutenant of the directorate, on the Musayfrah-Kiheel road.
7. On 11 September 2020, unidentified persons shot and killed Muhammad Wasim al-Youness, nicknamed al-Hant, and injured Muhammad Khaled al-Youness in Mahja town.

Notably, al-Hant was a commander of an armed group under the Military Security Service and his assassination occurred at the end of a meeting between his group and another also working for the Military Security Service. STJ's field researcher reported that the meeting was held to resolve a dispute between the two groups about their efforts to attract the largest number of volunteer recruits and consequently curry the favor of the Director of the Daraa-based Military Intelligence Branch, Louay al-Ali.

Al-Hant's family accused the commander of the second group, Ramadan al-Hamier, of killing their son because Mahja town abounds with Syrian regular forces and their affiliated security posts.

F. Political Assassinations

Over the covered period, STJ's field researcher recorded 11 separate political assassinations. The assassination victims included six reconciliation delegates with the CRC in Daraa, two municipality directors, two members of local government-affiliated parties, and a district director.

1. On the evening of 28 May 2020, unidentified perpetrators shot at a CRC delegation on its way out of a meeting. The attack was carried out on the Muzayrib- al-Ajami road, west of Daraa, where there are large numbers of former armed opposition groups. Three CRC members were killed—Audai al-Hashish, Rafat al-Barazi, and Adnan al-Shanbour. In the same attack, former commanders of armed opposition groups, who signed settlement agreements with the Syrian government, were injured, including Mahmoud al-Bardan, nicknamed Abu Murshid, Abu Ali Mustafa, and Ahmad al-Assemi. Later, after being injured in the attack, Muhanad Mansour Abu Hamdan, a commander nicknamed al-Za'im, died at the Daraa National Hospital from his wounds.
2. On 12 June 2020, unidentified persons shot and killed two other CRC members, Adnan Yousef al-Dnaifat and Yasser al-Dnaifat, nicknamed Abu Baker. The

assassination was carried out in Jasim city, in al-Jaidor region, west of Daraa, where there are large numbers of former armed opposition fighters. Adnan Yousef al-Dnaifat was a former commander of al-Thawra Army/Army of the Revolution, an opposition-affiliated armed group.

3. On 19 June 2020, unidentified individuals shot machine guns at Ghaidak Iskander's car on the al-Harak-Nahata road, where there are large numbers of Iranian and Syrian regular forces. Iskander was the director of al-Harak district, east of Daraa. He was assassinated and several other militants in his car were injured.
4. On 14 August 2020, unidentified persons shot and killed Fdail Jadallah Musleh, his son Mu'taz, a university student, and 8-year-old daughter Ghufuran. Musleh was director of the Aib Town Municipality, in al-Lajat region, east of Daraa, where there are large numbers of Iranian and Syrian regular forces. Musleh and his children were shot near their house.
5. On 10 September 2020, unidentified persons shot and killed Muhammad Jamal al-Jalm, nicknamed Abu al-Braa, in Jasim city, where there are large numbers of former armed opposition fighters. Al-Jalm was one of Daraa's renowned personalities. He was a former judge at the Dar al-Adel Court in Horan when the armed opposition was still in control of the area. Later, he signed a settlement agreement with the Syrian government and joined the CRC.
6. On 26 October 2020, unidentified persons on a motorcycle shot and killed the Director of the Municipal Council, Abdulsalam al-Hmaid, in al-Sanamayn city, north of Daraa, where there are large numbers of Iranian and Syrian regular forces. The perpetrators escaped the assassination site but also managed to injure Secretary of the al-Sanamayn Ba'ath party Division, Muhammad Diab. The latter was transported to the al-Sanamayn Military Hospital and treated there.

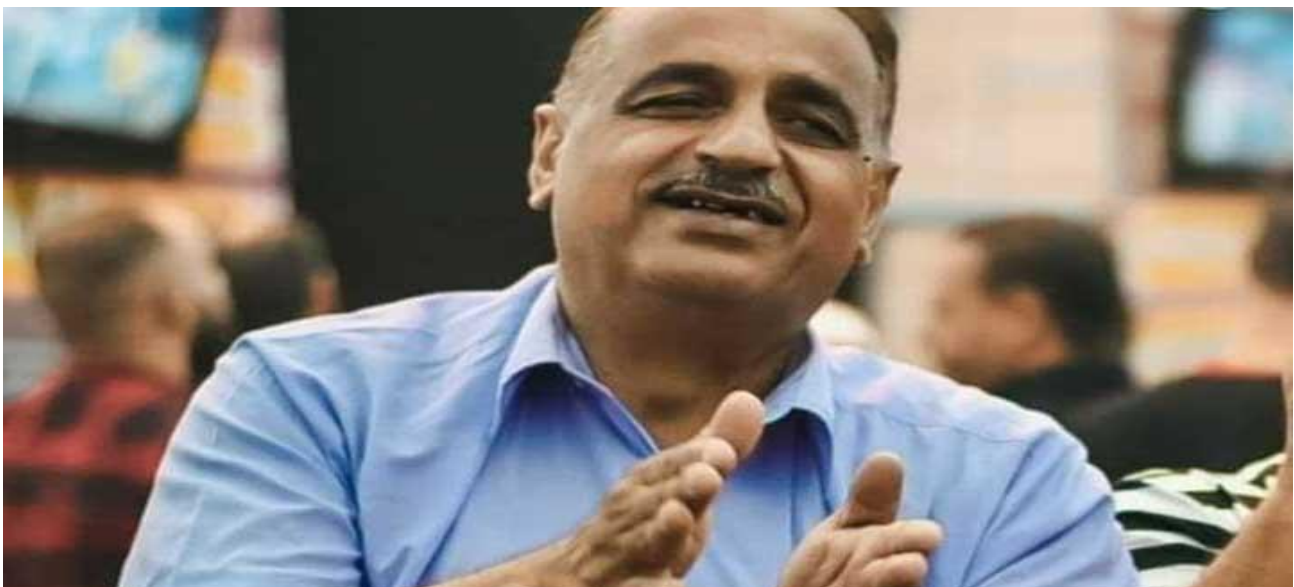


Image 4-Director of the al-Sanamayn Municipality, Abdulsalam al-Hmaid. Credit: Media activists.

7. Similar assassinations targeted members and leaders of local political parties, such as the Secretary of the Ba'ath Party in Nawa city, west of Daraa, where there are large numbers of armed opposition groups. On 7 April 2020, the secretary was killed in a drive-by shooting in front of the party's building.

G. Assassinations of Russian Force, Iranian Militia, and/or Lebanese Hezbollah Affiliated Fighters

Several assassinations targeted groups and fighters affiliated with the Russia-founded 5th Legion,⁴ as well as groups affiliated with Hezbollah and Iran. These attacks, amounting to 11% of the incidents of violence reported, killed 23 individuals.

a) Assassinations targeting fighters of the Russia-founded 5th Legion.

1. On 20 June 2020, a bus transporting members of the 5th Legion was hit in an explosive device blast, planted earlier on the road to Kiheel, east of Daraa, where there are large numbers of Syrian regular forces and Iranian militia fighters.

The blast claimed the lives of nine persons and wounded over 25 others, who had mild or serious injuries. A little girl was among the injured, who, with her parents, was on site at the time of the explosion. The individuals killed were: Thaer al-Issa al-Miqdad, Mustafa al-Issa al-Miqdad, Yassin Adnan al-Issa al-Miqdad, Lieutenant Ibrahim Attallah, Khaled al-Khouja, Tarik al-Homsi, Yasser Hussameddin al-Miqdad, Muhammad Issa al-Miqdad, and Humam al-Kafari. This was the most violent attack recorded against the 5th Legion.

2. On 16 September 2020, unidentified gunmen shot and killed Moayad Muhammad al-Ghawazi, a member of the 5th Legion, in Saida town, east of Daraa, where there are large numbers of Syrian regular forces and Iranian militia fighters. Al-Ghawazi was a former fighter for armed opposition groups. He signed a settlement agreement and later joined the ranks of the 5th Legion.

b) Assassinations and attacks in Southern Syria on Iranian Militia fighters

Assassinations and attacks killed 6 Iranian Militia fighters, mostly working within the ranks of Lebanese Hezbollah. Two assassinations are described below:

1. On 13 April 2020, unidentified gunmen shot and killed Salman al-Tarshan at Muzayrib town, west of Daraa, where there are large numbers of former armed opposition fighters. Reportedly, al-Tarshan used to fight within the ranks of the

⁴ The 5th Legion consists of a number of former armed opposition groups and was established by Russia, who brought these groups together after they signed a settlement agreement with the Syrian government. The legion is led by Ahmad al-Awdeh. These groups have repeatedly demanded that the Syrian government, Iran, and the Lebanese Hezbollah leave the area. The groups spread across Daraa's cities and towns, establishing several security posts and checkpoints. The assassinations aimed at these groups killed 16 fighters and injured over 28 others.

4th Division in the province, particularly with a group affiliated to Abu Salem al-Khalidi, one of Hezbollah's proxies in southern Syria.

2. On 14 April 2020, unidentified persons shot and killed Muhammad Radwan Mulhem in Dael city, where there are large numbers of former armed opposition fighters. Mulhem was most likely a fighter within the ranks of a Hezbollah-affiliated group in the area, reported sources. His brother, Zaher Radwan Mulhem, was assassinated a year ago, also accused of working with the Lebanese Hezbollah.

3. Failed Assassinations

Over the reported period, STJ's researchers recorded 35 failed assassinations in different parts of Daraa province. These attacks wounded over 89 individuals, most of whom suffered from serious injuries. The majority of the attacks were typically carried out — shootings or planted explosive device detonations. In the majority of the incidents reported in this section, the perpetrators remain unknown.

1. On 15 June 2020, Amer al-Mahamid survived an assassination in the Umm al-Mayadin town, east of Daraa, where there are large numbers of Syrian regular forces and Iranian militia fighters. Al-Mahamid, a former fighter of the armed opposition, joined the Military Security Service after signing a settlement agreement with the Syrian government. Unknown perpetrators attached an explosive device to his car. While al-Mahamid survived, his brother, who was driving the car, was killed along with his wife and two children.
2. On 24 August 2020, Imad Abu Zuraik, a former commander of the armed opposition, survived assassination. As he passed by the al-Baik restaurant in a car convoy, a motorcycle bomb exploded, and guns fired at the convoy in a frenzy. While Abu Zuraik lived, several of his relatives died, including Malek Shadi Abu Zuraik, 7, and Ahmad Bassem Abu Zuraik, 17. Two other children were injured, Hamza Imad Abu Zuraik, 10, and Qusai Imad Abu Zuraik, as well as another relative, Thaer al-Balkhi. The convoy was targeted on the Dael-Daraa road, where there are large numbers of former armed opposition groups.

Abu Zuriak is one of the key figures that operated within the ranks of the former Yarmouk Army, affiliated with the armed opposition. He left for Jordan after the Syrian government forces took over southern Syria. He returned after being offered guarantees by Russia to work for the Military Security Service in Daraa.

3. On 17 September 2020, a massive blast shook Busra al-Sham city, east of Daraa, where there are large numbers of Syrian regular forces and Iranian militia fighters. Later, sources discovered that the blast resulted from the detonation of an explosive device that targeted Ali Bash and Qasim al-Miqdad, both commanders of groups within the ranks of the 5th Legion. The two were mildly injured and transported to the Busra al-Sham Hospital. This was the first assassination in Busra al-Sham city since the enforcement of the settlement agreement in 2018.

4. On 21 September 2020, Jamal al-Zubi survived an assassination in al-Taybah town, east of Daraa, where there are large numbers of Syrian regular forces and Iranian militia fighters. Al-Zubi is a judge at the Daraa City Court of Appeal. Unidentified persons planted an explosive device in his car, but he discovered the device before it exploded.
5. On 27 September 2020, Maher al-Labad survived assassination in al-Sanamayn city, where there are large numbers of Syrian regular forces and Iranian militia fighters. He was shot and injured. Al-Labad is a former armed opposition fighter who signed a settlement agreement and later joined the Military Security Service.
6. On 7 October 2020, Mustafa al-Masalmeh, former commander of the armed opposition nicknamed al-Kasem, survived an assassination attempt in Daraa al-Balad, where there are large numbers of former armed opposition fighters. Unidentified individuals shot him while he rode his motorcycle near the Old Daraa Customs Department. Al-Kasem signed a settlement agreement with the Syrian government and joined a local armed group that operates under the Military Security Service.
7. On 15 December 2020, Yasser Amar Qataf survived assassination in al-Harak city, east of Daraa, where there are large numbers of Syrian regular forces and Iranian militias. Unidentified persons shot Qataf in front of his house at night, wounding him. Qataf was a former armed opposition fighter who later signed a settlement agreement with the Syrian government.

4. Over 13 Armed Clashes Occurred in Daraa

Over 13 armed clashes were documented in Daraa, which killed over 13 persons and injured more than 12 others. Some of these clashes included:

1. On 13 May 2020, personnel of the Military Security Service, close to Iranian militias, blocked the way of one of the Russia-formed 5th Legion's groups in al-Harak city, east of Daraa. The groups exchanged gunfire using machine guns in residential neighborhoods. Many people were wounded, including a little boy, Khaled Zuhair al-Zamil, who sustained serious injuries.

The Military Security personnel arrested two members of the 5th Legion and handed them over to the Military Security Center in Daraa. The arrested were charged with conducting assassinations. Sporadic clashes ensued for two days. Groups of the 5th legion raided Military Security Service checkpoints and Air Force Intelligence checkpoints to release the two arrested militants.

2. On 27 May 2020, groups of the 5th Legion and personnel of the State Security Service, affiliated with Iranian militias, exchanged gunfire using light weaponry in Mhaja town, east of Daraa. The clashes occurred after a militant of the 5th Legion refused to stop at one of the State Security Service's checkpoints and show his identity document. Two of the 5th Legion militants died, Hassan al-Kadah, from Kiheel town and known as Abu Khalil, and Tawfik al-Hamad, from Mhaja town. AN officer deployed to the checkpoint was also killed.

3. On the evening of 30 October 2020, unidentified gunmen hit a municipal building where Air Force Intelligence forces were stationed in Tasil town, west of the province, with an RBG. An exchange of gunfire with light weaponry ensued; however, sources recorded no injuries or deaths.

5. The Violent Toll on Civilians

The reported assassinations and clashes adversely affect the living conditions in Daraa province. As a result, thefts, kidnappings, and organized crime spread across the area, while bribery increased openly in government departments. A number of civilians were murdered or injured for various reasons, including revenge and theft.

A. Family Disputes and Blood Feuds

As rule of law failed in Daraa province, family disputes and blood feuds grew recurrent. Sources documented the deaths of nine civilians, among them two women, and the injury of over eight others.

1. Ali Hussain al-Haj, from Jasim city, east of Daraa, was shot and killed on 5 August 2020 during a family dispute. Al-Haj's son was also seriously injured during the shooting.
2. On 6 August 2020, a woman was killed and three men were injured due to disputes in one neighborhood in Giza town, east of Daraa.
3. On 17 June 2020, Ahmad Khaled al-Muflh al-Rifai, from Nasib town, was killed in a retaliatory killing due to a blood feud in the Umm al-Mayadin town, east of Daraa. He was shot and killed during the in front of other people.

B. Robbery Murders

1. On 19 July 2020, unidentified men broke into a house and killed a woman, her husband, and granddaughter. Two other women were injured. The dead bodies of elderly Ahmad Farhan al-Shalabi, his wife Rasmiya Abdullah al-Shalabi, and their little granddaughter Bayan Abdulhalim al-Shalabi, were found at their home in Inkhil city, east of Daraa. The incident was recorded as a robbery murder.
2. On 17 October 2020, the dead body of Firas Mahmoud Hamdals, from Raqqa and resident of Daraa, was found on the Daraa-Damascus Highway. Unidentified men were reported to have killed Firas and stolen his car.

C. Unsolved Murders

Across Daraa suburbs, 16 dead bodies were discovered. All remain unsolved.

1. On 22 August 2020, the dead body of twenty-something Muhammad Abduljawad al-Hwaidi, from Ma'araba town, east of Daraa, was found beheaded at the al-Bahar

Cemetery in Daraa al-Balad. His violent murder was carried out for unknown reasons, and by unknown perpetrators.

2. On 1 September 2020, residents of Daraa al-Balad found the dead body of Yasser Jaber al-Masalmeh near the Power Station in Tariq al-Sad neighborhood. He went missing for three days, only ten days after he was released from the prison after a five-year sentence on the charges of drug trafficking.
3. On 19 May 2020, the dead body of Muhammad al-Mubarak, from Giza town, east of Daraa, and known as Abu Ali al-Shani', was found on the Giza- al-Taybah road. Al-Mubarak was found after having been missing for a day and his body showed clear signs of torture.

6. Security Measures to Reduce Violence in Western Daraa

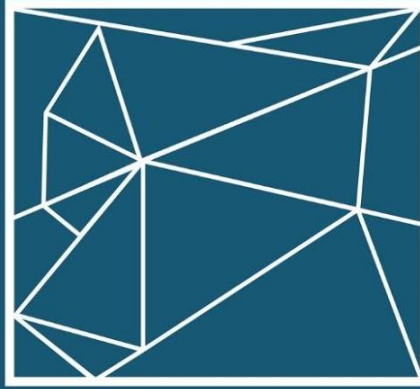
To limit the widespread violence, the Syrian government took several security measures, including the establishment of new checkpoints in the areas where its affiliated fighters were either attacked or assassinated.

On 30 May 2020, the 4th Division set up checkpoints in the western countryside of Daraa, one of the province's tensest areas, following negotiations between the Security Office of the 4th Division and the CRC. Checkpoints were subsequently established in the villages and towns of Kharab al-Shahem, Muzayrib, Tal Shihab, Nahj, al-Ajami, and Masakin Jaleen.

One major source of tension in Daraa is the issue of Syrian regular army defectors and draft evaders. Addressing the issue, the security authorities issued new instructions on 4 May 2020 through mosques' radio sets. The instructions urged defectors and draft evaders to register with mukhtars, or leaders, of neighborhoods or the secretaries of the Ba'ath Party divisions, to sign new settlement agreements.

سوريون
من أجل
الحقيقة
والعدالة

Syrians
For Truth
& Justice



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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