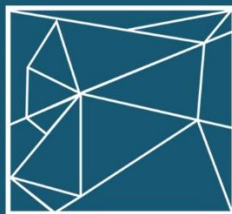


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سوريون
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For Truth
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HTS and TIP Continue to Pillage and Dismantle Public Facilities in Idlib Province

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Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) dismantled a bridge near Dama town and sold its parts, while the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP) dismantled the remaining sections of a sugar factory in Jisr al-Shughur region

In Bidama district, the military faction Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) demolished and dismantled parts of a [bridge](#) west of Idlib province. In Jisr al-Shughur district, the military faction Turkestan Islamic Party (TIP) dismantled and robbed the remaining parts of the province's [sugar factory](#), after it finished dismantling the Zayzoun Power Station and irrigation water pipes. The two factions sold the dismantled parts of the bridge and the sugar factory to scrap merchants in exchange for sums of money they were paid in advance for structural steel.

The HTS and the TIP have been looting and dismantling properties and infrastructure since mid-2020. Covering the factions' assaults on public properties, Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) previously published detailed reports on the pillage of the Zayzoun Power Station, irrigation water pipes, and other vital facilities.¹

Local activists interviewed by STJ said that the vandalization and pillage of the sugar factory had adversely affected the future of the region's famous sugar production and thus sugar beet cultivation. Activists added that farmers had hoped that one of the authorities/governments in the region would reoperate the factory which could have improved the region's agricultural and economic situation and provided additional job opportunities. Additionally, activists said that dismantling the Bidama bridge has denied the district's residents access to a main supply and transportation route.

1. Bidama Bridge Dismantled

The Bidama Bridge—known as the Latakia railway bridge— connects the towns of al-Zu'ainiya and Bidama west of Idlib province. The bridge passes over the Latakia railway, 245 m long and a and 18 m high. The bridge has eight frame piers, two made of concrete 16.5 m long and six made of steel 34 m long.

The information and testimonies collected by STJ confirm that HTS, currently in control of Idlib province, turned the bridge into an investment. HTS surrendered the bridge to a scrap and steel merchant in the area in exchange for a sum of money the merchant paid them ahead of the demolition work. On 11 January 2020, the merchant began wrecking the bridge to extract the steel used in its structure. However, the HTS stopped the dismantling process in late December, demanding additional money and alleging that the amounts of steel used in the bridge were not properly estimated. To obtain additional details on the Bidama bridge incident, STJ interviewed three local witnesses.

The civil activist Abu Muneer said:

“A person called Sh. R. made an investment agreement with HTS. On 11 January, [the merchant] started the dismantling work, and extracted rebars from the structure. The merchant wrecked the parapets and pulled out steel. Scrap was loaded on vehicles and sent to Jisr al-Shughur city.”

¹ “Desertification Threatens the Ghab Plain after TIP Removed Irrigation Pipes Fed by the Orontes River,” STJ, 10 November 2020, <https://stj-sy.org/en/261/> (last visited: 27 April 2021).

Bidama-based Nidal said:

“Five vehicles were filled with rebars over 10 days of demolition work. HTS vehicles were there. They provided protection for workers on site and monitored the amounts of extracted steel. On 30 January, demolition work stopped, and the wrecking machinery left. However, the upper part of the bridge was all gone and only the concrete piers were left.”

Civil activist Rakan Mawas said:

“The bridge’s demolition work stopped because HTS asked the investor [scrap merchant] for additional money besides the sum paid, alleging that steel amounts were not properly estimated and were larger than those stated in the contract. The merchant, in return, refused to pay the extra money, asked for the contract to be terminated and the advance money be paid back, and left the demolition site. HTS, however, refused to give the merchant the money back and referred the case to one of its affiliated courts.”

2. Sugar Factory Dismantled

The Sugar Factory is located 6 km south of Jisr al-Shughur city on the Jisr al-Shughur-Suqaylabiyah road. The factory and its annexed facilities are built on an area of one hectare, equivalent to 10,000 m².

The factory once processed sugar beet crops from the northwestern countryside of Hama and the western countryside of Idlib, with a production capacity of 1,300 tons per day. The factory was abandoned in June 2011 and controlled by armed opposition groups in April 2015.

Activist Muhammad al-Abdullah told STJ that airstrikes by Syrian government airstrikes rendered the factory inoperable. Later, HTS (back then al-Nusra Front) and the TIP managed to control the factory and turned it into a military station for their brigades.

Equipment looting and dismantling works at the factory started in April 2015, while TIP controlled the facility. The dismantling operations were initially gradual, but increased significantly in mid-2020 and ended late the same year. By the time the dismantling was finished, very little of the factory remained.

In a former report,² STJ obtained testimonies verifying that the HTS sold some of the factory’s pillaged equipment and machinery. Commenting on this, witness Abdulkareem al-Adnan said:

“Looting operations were initially limited to less-important contents, such as simple equipment, doors, and furniture. TIP fighters would steal these pieces and sell them to travelling scrap merchants. Between 2016 and 2017— while TIP fighters continued pillaging the facility— the military faction Harakat Ansar al-Sham used the factory as a military training center for its fighters.”

² “Seizure of Public and Private Properties in Jisr al-Shughur- Idlib Countryside,” STJ, 27 September 2020, <https://stj-sy.org/en/261/> (last visited: 27 April 2021).

Witness Salamah al-Idlibi said that in mid-2020, the TIP-led dismantling activities grew more organized. The faction brought machinery to lift larger parts and equipment and load them on large vehicles. He added:

“Big trucks transported the factory’s larger equipment to Idlib city, to be sold to merchants there. The dismantling and transportation of equipment continued for nearly six months. The factory was emptied of all machinery and equipment. Only walls, iron fencing, and a few large steel pipes remained.”

Activist Duriad Mahmoud told STJ that, in late 2020, TIP contracted with a scrap merchant, who dismantled iron boards and fences and extracted the rest of the rebars from the factory’s walls. He added:

“TIP did not only dismantle equipment at the Sugar Factory in Jisr al-Shughur, but the faction also rented out the factory’s building to one of the area’s merchants, F. A., who previously rented the cooling towers of the Zayzoun Power Station from TIP fighters. The merchant paid the faction 37,000 USD in return for materials left in the factory. In early December 2020, the merchant brought bulldozers and demolished the factory’s walls and the buildings surrounding it in search of rebars.”



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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