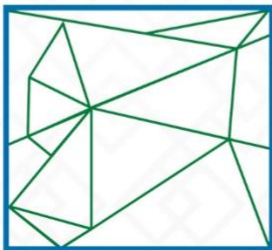


New evidence in the 2019  
murder of Muhammed  
Bouzan by Ahrar  
al-Sharqiyah fighters





## **New evidence in the 2019 murder of Muhammed Bouzan by Ahrar al-Sharqiyah fighters**

*A video published in 2021 by a former subfaction shows the killing of the AANES ambulance driver in the town of Suluk, while offering clues to the reported field executions of two others that day*

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in collaboration with Syrians for Truth & Justice





On October 13th, 2019, Syrian National Army (SNA) faction Tajammu' Ahrar al-Sharqiyah announced that they had captured the town of Suluk, located in the northern al-Raqqa countryside. This occurred within the context of 'Operation Peace Spring,' in which the Turkish Army and its SNA proxies invaded portions of northeast Syria controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), taking over a strip of land stretching 100km along the border and 30km to the south.

Infamously, on the morning of October 12th, Ahrar al-Sharqiyah briefly took control of a checkpoint along the M4 highway where its fighters murdered Kurdish politician Hevrin Khalaf and several others, before withdrawing to the north. As will be addressed in the next post, the footage from Operation Peace Spring ([starting at 6:50](#)) begins approximately ten and a half hours after the murders on the M4, 13.5km to the northwest. This piece primarily covers the section of [video from 19:00](#) to 23:30, in the moments after Ahrar al-Sharqiyah entered the town of Suluk.

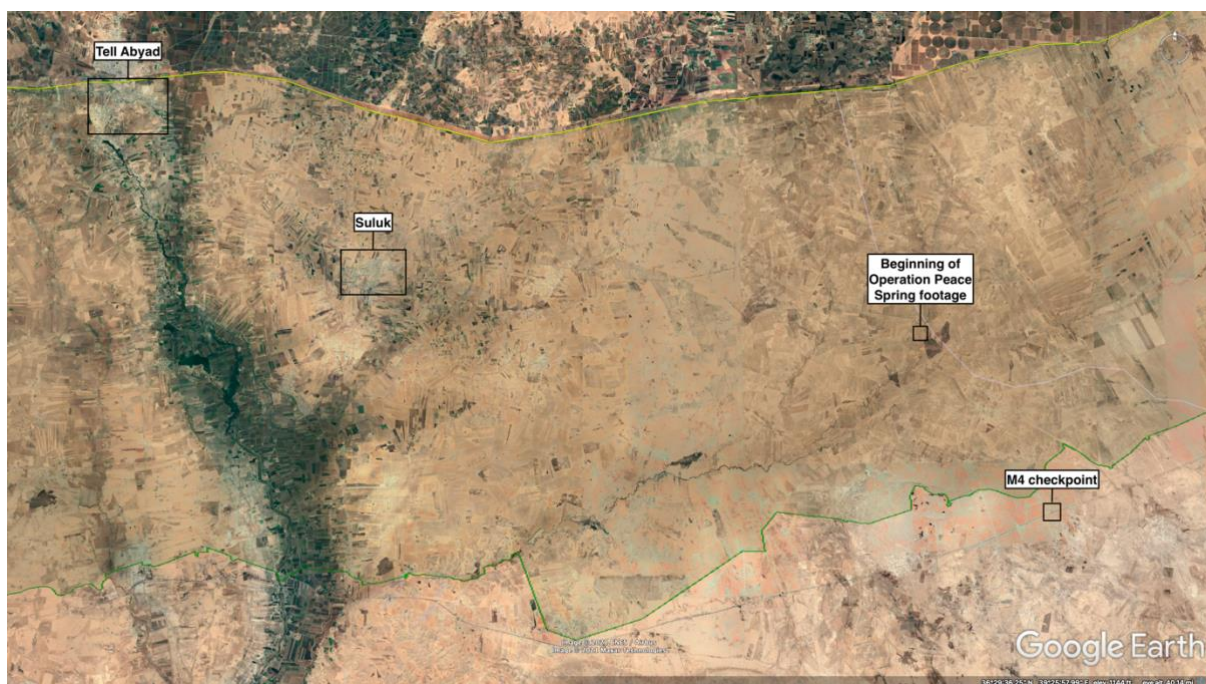


Image (1) - Relevant locations with current Turkish/SNA zone of control marked in green.

It should be stated that the timestamp seen at the bottom right of the video is inaccurate; the date is over three years behind, while the time is twelve hours behind. I will refer to the fighters seen in the video as members of Liwa' al-Qadisiyah as the group's emblem is the only one seen on flags on October 13th, however it's likely that some individuals visible were affiliated with other Ahrar al-Sharqiyah subfactions.







## The Cases

On October 13, 2019, reports circulated of three individuals executed by Ahrar al-Sharqiyah fighters following the capture of the town of Suluk. Confirmed information regarding these cases was scarce, due to limited eyewitness testimony and a meager amount of visual evidence available. A Syrians for Truth & Justice (STJ) [investigation](#) published in February 2020 provided more clarity to this case, though the specifics have remained inconclusive ever since.

STJ identified the victims as: Medea Khalil Issa (18), a medical staff employee of the AANES Health Authority at the Tell Abyad Military Hospital and part-time KRC volunteer, Muhammed Bouzan (18), who worked for the Tell Abyad Military Hospital as a CCTV technician transferred to the position of ambulance driver at the beginning of the Turkish invasion, and Hevi Khalil, an SDF fighter deployed as an ambulance escort.



Image (2) - Right: Medea Khalil Issa, Left: a picture of Medea's page within her family booklet, a Syrian civil registration document.

The limited eyewitness testimony collected by STJ points to Medea Khalil Issa having taken refuge in a hospital located in the center of Suluk. Here she was discovered by Ahrar al-Sharqiyah fighters who reportedly executed Medea despite her identifying herself as a nurse. The two witnesses interviewed did not have information on the circumstances in which Muhammed Bouzan and Hevi Khalil were killed, only having seen their corpses afterwards.





Testimony given by family members of Muhammed Bouzan and Medea Khalil Issa show that they received little information apart from rumors with regards to how their relatives were killed.



Image (3) - Muhammed Bouzan.

The only visual evidence available from the scene of these reported crimes was a picture of Muhammed Bouzan's dead body, leaked from a private message, with boots of a combatant visible in the background. Muhammed's brother confirmed his identity to STJ.





Image (4) - A fighter standing over Muhammed Bouzan's dead body.

The Liwa' al-Qadisiyah video presents definitive evidence as to how ambulance driver Muhammed Bouzan was killed. Unfortunately, with regards to Medea Khalil Issa and Hevi Khalil, this video offers possible clues as to where and when they were killed but ultimately nothing conclusive.

## The Killing of Muhammed Bouzan

The video shows Liwa al-Qadisiyah entering Suluk from the east, arriving at the center of town at approximately 7:30AM on motorbikes and a M113 APC. In the scenes prior, from October 12th and October 13th, they face no SDF opposition as it appears all defensive forces have withdrawn from this flat and sparsely-populated region between Tell Abyad and Ras al-'Ain/Serê Kaniyê by this time.

At [minute nineteen](#) of the video, the first contingent of fighters is seen meeting with two men at an intersection just southeast of the main traffic circle. A video caption appears stating "Meeting the members that were working to collect information about the party [referring to the PKK, used interchangeably by the SNA with the SDF] on the inside," implying the two men, who point the fighters north, were living in the town undercover.





Image (5) - “Meeting the elements who were working to collect information about the party on the inside.”

While assumptions from analysts and opposition supporters that Turkey’s invasion would lead to mass Arab unrest and withdrawal from the SDF and AANES projects proved blatantly untrue, this does point to the fact pro-Turkish and SNA informants and undercover agents operate within AANES-governed areas. This is likely a factor in the success of Turkey’s ongoing drone assassination campaign, targeting SDF commanders and civilian activists.

Seconds after arriving at the main circle of Suluk, Liwa’ al-Qadisiyah fighters encounter Muhammed Bouzan’s ambulance coming from the direction the two men had pointed in. They immediately open fire on Bouzan as he drives west down the town’s main street.

The van features visible sirens on its roof and appears to feature one of the logos used by the Rojava Kurdish Red Crescent on the side, clearly demarcated as an ambulance. Despite this, the fighters engage the vehicle with gunfire and in the video caption identify it as a car of the Party. It’s unclear why the Health Authority would be using KRC vehicles, though seems plausible that in this time of crisis the AANES marshaled any available resources.







Image (6) - "Arriving in the center of the town of Suluk and encountering a [car of the Party] and killing those in it."

Liwa' al-Qadisiyah fighters chase the ambulance west using both the main street and a parallel side street to the south. By the time the cameraman spots it, the vehicle is stationary. A burst of shots can be heard from the street at 20:59.



Image (7) - The moment the ambulance is spotted by the cameraman at its final resting point.







A shot taken nineteen seconds later (as recorded on the time stamp) shows the interior of the ambulance. A fighter drag's Muhammed Bouzan's lifeless body out from the passenger's side. Bullet holes can be seen in both the driver's and passenger's side windows.



Image (8) – Muhammed Bouzan's body being dragged out of the ambulance by a fighter.



Image (9) – A map of the how the killing of Muhammed Bouzan unfolded and the movements of the cameraman.





As fighters in the first clip could only be seen on the south side of the street, one plausible scenario is that the bullets which pierced the passenger's window are those heard in video 2, fired after the car stopped moving.

It's unclear whether Muhammed Bouzan was the only person in the ambulance at the time. Over a minute and a half elapses in the footage without a view of the van, potentially enough time for a passenger to escape on foot, though it's impossible to say for certain.



Image (10) - "Bodies of PKK mercenaries in the streets of the town" (29:41).

At 29:31, approximately an hour and a half later real time, the cameraman man walks by Muhammed Bouzan's body. It's lying on the street at the same location where the ambulance stopped; the vehicle has since been moved. The caption uses the plural of body (juthath), though Bouzan's is the only body that can be made out, so it's possible this is a typo. There is an object on the street obscured by a bush, making it impossible to identify.





Image (11) – The image of Muhammed Bouzan’s dead body that was published on social media.

The position of the body and the black jacket next to it matches an image of the ambulance driver taken that day and shared on social media.

## The Suluk Local Hospital

After dragging Muhammed Bouzan’s body out of the ambulance, a group of fighters gather outside a building located around the corner. The building in which the fighters appear to examine bears a sign reading “Suluk Local Hospital (Mashfa Suluk al-Ahli).” This is a site mentioned in the STJ report, however we had confused it with another location and did not have access to visual evidence for confirmation.







Image (12) – Sign labelled Suluk Local Hospital highlighted in red.



Image (13) - Geolocation of the Suluk Local Hospital.

According to the caption they meet with [group] members “working security inside the town,” and kill an “entire group inside it,” again emphasizing the role undercover fighters and informants played during the taking of Suluk. One fighter stands at the entrance but within the 40 seconds of video at this location we see no one enter or leave the hospital. At 21:16 a burst





of shots can be heard though it's unclear whether these came from inside the hospital or from elsewhere.

One of these men working undercover in the town for Liwa' al-Qadisiyah can be seen wearing a brown thawb. He is handed military webbing two minutes.



Image (14) - A formerly undercover member of Liwa' al-Qadisiyah being given webbing.

At this point is necessary to highlight the two testimonies collected by STJ's field researcher from civilians nearby at the time. Witness one:

“When the National Army began entering the town, we hid inside the hospital, we heard then an intense gunfire approaching, and saw a girl entering the hospital. When we attempted to leave, members of Ahrar al-Sharqiya stopped us and asked about our nationality; whether we were Kurds or Arabs, then they asked if we saw a girl hiding inside, we told them that we do not know and did not see anyone. I looked around and saw the corpse of a woman in military clothing and the body of a young man inside the ambulance. The members removed the bodies from the car and put them on the floor, and one of them entered the hospital and dragged the girl; she was screaming, I'm a nurse, I'm a nurse, but they shot her immediately and she fell dead.”

Witness two:

“When the National Army began entering the town of Suluk in the morning, we hid inside the house, as there were heavy gunshots and we did not know what was happening. When gunshots stopped, we heard the cries of men saying “Allahu Akbar” “Allahu Akbar”. I went out with my father to see what happened. I heard members of the group saying that there is a woman from the party hiding in the hospital. When one of the members noticed our presence, he shouted at us and told us to go back to our house. After that we heard gunfire “Allahu Akbars” again, but after about an hour





we no longer heard anything. So, we went out to the street and saw two corpses, for girls one in a medical uniform and another in military suit (of SDF) and another for a young man lying on the ground.”

Unfortunately, the brief footage shot outside the hospital in this video does not allow us to confirm (nor rule out) these testimonies as they related to the deaths of Medea Khalil Issa and Hevi Khalil. The only conclusions we can draw from the video is that the hospital is located in close proximity to the site where Muhammed Bouzan’s body was removed from his ambulance and that Muhammed’s death occurred prior to the hospital being searched.

## The Second Vehicle

Three minutes and twenty seconds after the last hospital footage, Liwa’ al-Qadisiyah fighters open fire on a second vehicle. The vehicle is first seen stationary on a side street one block west of the hospital, approximately 150 meters from Muhammed Bouzan’s ambulance.



Image (15) - “Engaging with mercenaries of Öcalan and causing direct injuries”

The driver’s side door is open and an individual in a blue shirt is seen running around the van, opening the passenger’s side door, before sprinting into the park just to the west. It’s possible that the blue shirt is a medical scrubs top which would point to this individual seen leaving the van as Medea Khalil Issa. However, this is the only shot in the video showing this person making it impossible to actually identify them.

This segment of footage was published zoomed in, which in conjunction with the camera movement caused by rifle recoil makes it difficult to discern detail. With that said, it does appear that an individual is standing behind the trees west of the parked van, possibly aiming a rifle.







Image (16) - What appears to be an individual hiding behind a tree.



Image (17) - What appears to be an individual hiding behind a tree.

Later in the video (23:56), a fighter briefly approaches the van and begins to return to the main street when he is shot - presumably by someone in the park - and falls to the ground. He is soon dragged to cover and picked up by the M113, later succumbing to his injuries. After this incident, we see no more of the individual in the blue, or anyone else other than the dead body of Muhammed Bouzan.



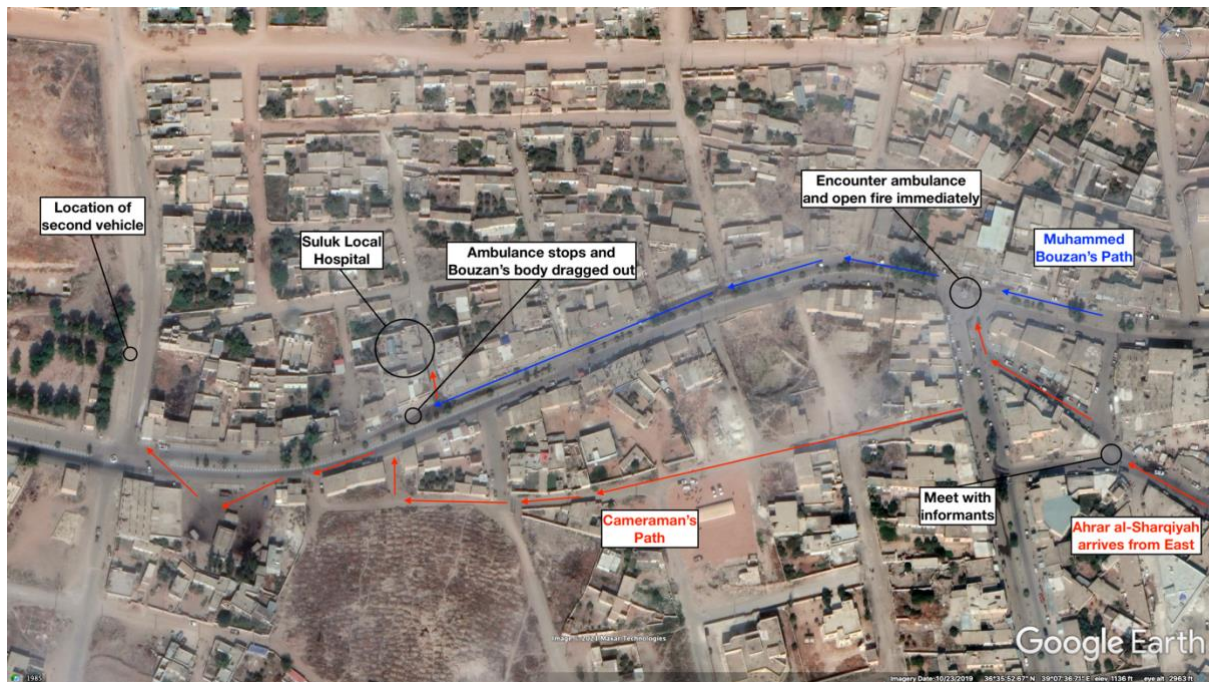


Image (18) – A map of key events captured in the video.

## Conclusion

With this video evidence we can definitively say that members of Ahrar al-Sharqiyah opened fire on the ambulance Muhammed Bouzan was driving, immediately upon encountering it. Muhammed was killed at some point either prior to or immediately after the vehicle stopped. We next seen Muhammed's body splayed out the street approximately an hour and a half later, at which point the ambulance has been moved to an unknown location.

As for when, where and in what manner Medea Khalil Issa and Hevi Khalil were killed we still do not have a conclusive picture. Were one or both in the ambulance and able to flee in the minute and a half that goes by before the cameraman arrives at the vehicle? Or perhaps one was killed at the same scene but we were not shown the body? Was the individual in the blue shirt seen fleeing the second van Medea? As the testimonies we have do not include the specific times of events, we are not able to completely piece this visual evidence with what the witnesses saw.

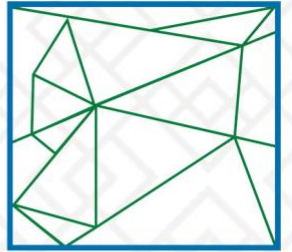
What we do know is that three dead bodies were eventually laid out on the street: one male and two female, one of which was dressed in scrubs, the other in a military fatigues.

Speaking to STJ, an eyewitness testified that:

“Members of Ahrar al-Sharqiya did not allow us to bury the bodies and told us not to approach them, they left them thrown in the street for two whole days. However, after smells started to emit from the bodies, the people protested and asked for their burial. Then Ahrar al-Sharqiya members came with a large excavation vehicle and took the bodies to an unknown location.”







## About Us:

Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) is a nonprofit, nongovernmental organization monitoring human rights violations in Syria. Founded in 2015, STJ has been based in France since 2019.

STJ is an impartial and independent Syrian human rights organization operating across Syria. Our network of field researchers monitor and report human rights violations occurring on the ground in Syria, while our international team of human rights experts, lawyers, and journalists gather evidence, examine emerging patterns of violations, and analyze how violations break domestic Syrian and international law.

We are committed to documenting violations of human rights committed by all parties in the Syrian conflict and elevating the voices of all Syrians victimized by human rights violations, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, political affiliation, class, and/or gender. Our commitment to human rights monitoring is founded on the idea that professional human rights documentation meeting international standards is the first step to uncovering the truth and achieving justice in Syria.



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