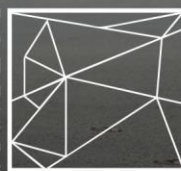


“My Entire Life Savings Vanished Overnight”

Housing, Land, and Property Rights Violations in “Peace Spring” Strip



“My Entire Life Savings Vanished Overnight”: Housing, Land, and Property Rights Violations in “Peace Spring” Strip

The Turkish government must stop all violations in Syria, restore rights, and ensure the safe return of displaced persons to their places of origin

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1. Executive Summary

This detailed report is based on 38 interviews with direct victims or their relatives. It outlines various housing, land, and property rights violations, such as seizure, looting, extortion, illegal land exploitation, and other related offenses. These violations also involve arrest, torture, threats of arrest, or financial extortion against internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tell Abyad/Girê Spî or their relatives.

Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) has released this report to commemorate the fifth anniversary of Türkiye's Operation Peace Spring on 9 October 2019. The operation was conducted in collaboration with the Syrian National Army (SNA) against the areas of Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tell Abyad/Girê Spî in northeastern Syria. As a result of the operation, Türkiye gained control over the two cities and large parts of their surrounding areas.

The region where Türkiye still exercises control has experienced significant demographic changes following the military operation. This has led to the displacement of nearly 200,000 residents, the majority of whom are Kurds. While some have returned to the region, most continue to live in camps that do not provide adequate living conditions. Additionally, many have been relocated to cities such as Raqqa and al-Hasakah, as well as towns and villages in northeastern Syria. Thousands have also sought refuge in Iraqi Kurdistan and European countries (i.e., Germany and the Netherlands). Most of the displaced people we spoke to expressed that they are facing significant economic challenges, leading some to pull their children out of school and have them join the labor market.

The report discusses the major factors contributing to the demographic changes in the region. These include preventing the return of IDPs, resettling fighters and their families in the homes of the local population, Turkification practices, annexing Syrian areas and integrating them into Turkish states, and forcibly relocating thousands of Syrian refugees from Türkiye to these areas under the guise of “voluntary return” to a “safe zone”. Additionally, the report highlights widespread human rights violations such as arbitrary arrest, detention, torture, and financial extortion, which have been reported by IDPs attempting to return to their villages. The absence of accountability and means of redress has led to continued forced displacement. The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI-Syria) has confirmed these violations in its latest report issued on 12 August 2024.

Ongoing violations of housing, land, and property rights contribute to the demographic change in these areas. The present report documents violations, including destroying at least 60 homes, 51 shops, commercial properties, and agricultural lands covering an estimated 4,747 hectares (47.47 square kilometers). Additionally, a large amount of agricultural and industrial equipment and tons of seeds intended for planting were also affected. These violations occurred right after the Turkish incursion or at different times during it. Notably, none of the displaced individuals we interviewed recovered their properties.

2. Legal Opinion and Recommendations

2.1. Legal characterization of the Turkish presence in Syrian territories

As per Article 42 of the 1907 Hague Regulations relating to the laws and customs of war on land, the Turkish presence in Syrian areas is considered an occupation. The Article states that “Territory is considered occupied when it is actually placed under the authority of the hostile army. The occupation applies only to the territory where such authority is established, and in a position to assert itself.” According to testimonies gathered by STJ for this report and previous reports,¹ Türkiye exercises *de facto* control over Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tell Abyad/Girê Spî. This control is maintained through the presence of approximately 41 military points and bases in the region, direct control over the service sectors through the office of the governor of Şanlıurfa (a Turkish province bordering the two cities), and the display of the Turkish flag in various departments and institutions located there. The COI-Syria confirmed Türkiye's actual control over the areas covered in the report.²

As such, when a foreign state has effective control over the territory of an attacked state, it is considered an occupation according to international law. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) supported this view in a case between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda. The court ruled that Uganda's control over the Kibali-Ituri province of the Congo constituted an occupation, based on customary international law and Article 42 of the Hague Regulations of 1907.³ Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch (HRW) have also referred to the Turkish presence in Syrian areas under its control as an occupation in their reports documenting violations in those areas.⁴

As an occupying power, Türkiye is legally obligated, based on the 1949 Geneva Convention (IV), to fulfill its duties in the areas it occupies. It is responsible for protecting the property of the civilian population and not seizing or destroying it,⁵ as stipulated in Article 43 of the Hague Regulations of 1907.⁶ Those involved in these violations must be held accountable, especially since the report confirms that the seizure of homes and properties was for housing military personnel and their families, or for obtaining ransoms and blackmailing the owners to force

¹ See, for example: “Torture in the Peace Spring Strip: A Tool for Persecution and the Perpetuation of Forced Displacement”, STJ, 26 June 2023, <https://stj-sy.org/en/torture-in-the-peace-spring-strip-a-tool-for-persecution-and-the-perpetuation-of-forced-displacement/> (Last accessed: 18 September 2024)

² Report of COI-Syria (A/HRC/45/31), 15 September 2020, para. 67.

³ Summaries of judgments, advisory opinions and orders of the International Court of Justice 2003-2007, p. 156.

⁴ See: “Syria: Turkey must stop serious violations by allied groups and its own forces in Afrin”, Amnesty International, 2 August 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/08/syria-turkey-must-stop-serious-violations-by-allied-groups-and-its-own-forces-in-afrin/> (Last accessed: 17 September 2024);

See also: “Illegal Transfers of Syrians to Turkey”, HRW, 3 February 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/02/03/illegal-transfers-syrians-turkey> (Last accessed: 17 September 2024).

⁵ Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 12 August 1949, Articles 2-52, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/geneva-convention-relative-protection-civilian-persons-time-war>

⁶ As an occupying power, Türkiye is required under Article 43 of the Hague Regulations of 1907 to take all measures within its power to restore and ensure public order and safety. It must also respect Syrian laws in force in the occupied territories as much as possible. This obligation includes ensuring respect for applicable rules of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, protecting the population of the occupied territory from acts of violence, and not tolerating such violence by any third party. See: <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/hague-conv-iv-1907/regulations-art-43?activeTab=>

them to leave and perpetuate demographic change in the region. There is no evidence indicating any inevitable military necessity for these violations.

2.2. Violation of housing, land, and property rights from a legal perspective

The violations and attacks mentioned in this report impact the right to property and adequate housing.⁷ There is a significant difference between international and domestic laws, particularly in Syria, in how this type of violation is addressed and legally characterized, as well as in how the severity of the violation is assessed and the corresponding punishment. Thereby, we will examine the criminal acts that targeted private property from the perspective of each law separately;

2.2.1. From the perspective of international law

Victims’ testimonies obtained for this report make it clear that real estate, homes, and other properties have been seized or confiscated systematically and on a large scale, without imperative military necessity. This has led to the forced displacement and migration of the civilian population. These actions violate the rules of international human rights law and international humanitarian law (the laws of war),⁸ some of which are considered international custom. Perpetrators of these violations may face individual criminal responsibility under international criminal law.

Many international human rights instruments and charters protect the right to property and adequate housing. For example, Article 17 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, “Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.” The destruction or demolition of homes or the forced displacement of their inhabitants is also considered a violation of Article 17.1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which affirms that “No one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence.” The Human Rights Commission also affirmed in its resolution No. 77/1993 dated 10 March that “The practice of forced eviction constitutes a gross violation of human rights, in particular, the right to adequate housing.” It urged governments to take immediate measures at all levels to eliminate the practice of forced eviction. In Principle 6 of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, the Human Rights Commission reiterated, “Every human being shall have the right to be protected against being arbitrarily displaced from his or her home or place of habitual residence.”⁹

The right to property and adequate housing is protected under the rules of international humanitarian law. According to Article 147 of the Geneva Convention (IV), relative to the protection of civilian persons in time of war, extensive destruction and appropriation of property not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly are considered grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions. While housing is not explicitly

⁷ See for example: “Housing, Land and Property (HLP)”, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), <https://emergency.unhcr.org/protection/protection-principles/housing-land-and-property-hlp>, Last updated: 7 March 2023. (Last accessed: 26 September 2024).

⁸ For example, Article 46 (2) of the Hague Regulations of 1907 specifies that private property may not be seized, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/hague-conv-iv-1907/regulations-art-46?activeTab=>

⁹ Report by UN Special Rapporteur (A/77/190): “Adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and the right to non-discrimination in this context”, 19 July 2022.

mentioned in many provisions of international humanitarian law, it is generally protected as a “civilian object” or “civilian property.” Additionally, forced evictions, including deportation, displacement, or population transfer,¹⁰ are explicitly prohibited in Article 49 of the Geneva Convention (IV).¹¹

Per Article 8, paragraphs 2 and 4 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court of 1998, extensive destruction and appropriation of property not justified by military necessity is considered a war crime. This applies particularly when it is part of a large-scale plan or policy, whether in an international or non-international armed conflict. The prohibition of the destruction or seizure of property has also been confirmed, except in cases of imperative military necessity, under the rules of customary international law that apply to all states, groups, and individuals involved in armed conflicts, whether international or non-international.¹²

The Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing has proposed classifying serious violations of this right as separate crimes under international criminal law and proposed “The Crime of Domicide” as a title of such crimes. The Special Rapporteur highlighted the importance of considering this proposal due to the severe human rights violations associated with housing destruction and the resulting human suffering. He defined Domicide as “The deliberate destruction of homes, the rendering of homes uninhabitable or any other systematic denial of housing when such acts are carried out in violation of international law and committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack against any civilian population.”¹³

The Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons stated in her report issued in April 2021 that the loss of land and housing is a significant aspect of internal displacement. Displacement caused by conflict often results in violations of housing, land, and property rights and is frequently used as a discriminatory tactic to displace certain groups based on their religious, ethnic, social, or political affiliations and to prevent their return.¹⁴ The report covered violations and seizures of civilian homes in certain areas, where properties were seized and owners prevented from returning on the grounds that they were loyal to or agents of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). In some instances, the violators referred to the owners as “Kurdish dogs.”

2.2.2. From the perspective of Syrian legislation

The Syrian Interim Government (SIG) claims to respect and apply the Syrian laws that were in place before 2011,¹⁵ particularly the 1950 Constitution, which “represent the revolution,” as stated by its former Minister of Justice. In this light, we will analyze the violations of the rights to housing and property committed by armed factions affiliated with the Ministry of Defense

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ For more info, see, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/gciv-1949/article-49>

¹² Customary International Humanitarian Law Rules, Rule 50, available at: <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl/v1> ;

See also: Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/rome-statute-international-criminal-court> (Last accessed: 26 September 2024).

¹³ Report by UN Special Rapporteur (A/77/190): “Adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and the right to non-discrimination in this context”, 19 July 2022.

¹⁴ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons, Ms. Cecilia Jimenez-Damary (A/HRC/47/37), issued on 21 April 2021.

¹⁵ Report of COI-Syria (A/HRC/40/70), 28 February 2019, para. 70.

in the SIG based on the abovementioned laws.¹⁶ It is crucial to address these violations and adapt them according to Syrian laws because they impact the properties of Syrian citizens on Syrian territories. We also aim to determine whether Syrian laws have adequately addressed the violations of the right to ownership and adequate housing and whether they have established appropriate criminal penalties for them.

The 2012 Constitution, which was influenced by its predecessors including the 1950 Constitution, states, “Collective and individual private ownership shall be protected in accordance with the following basis:

1. General confiscation of funds shall be prohibited;
 - a. Private ownership shall not be removed except in the public interest by a decree and against fair compensation according to the law;
 - b. Confiscation of private property shall not be imposed without a final court ruling;
 - c. Private property may be confiscated for necessities of war and disasters by a law and against fair compensation;
2. Compensation shall be equivalent to the real value of the property.” (Article 15).¹⁷

However, victims and those affected have stated that there is no military necessity justifying the looting and seizures. Additionally, no law has been issued regarding these confiscations, and no compensation has been provided to the victims for their stolen property. Instead, those who demanded the return of their property were subjected to harassment, extortion, arrest, or torture. Some were even forced to buy back the contents of their looted homes, and others were coerced into paying money for false promises of property return. Furthermore, some were threatened with weapons to stop their demands.

The seizure of real estate and the deprivation of its owners of their property without cause constitute a clear violation of what was stipulated in the Syrian Civil Code of 1949, which states, “No one may be deprived of his property except in cases determined by law, and in return for fair compensation” (Article 771); “The owner has the sole right, within the limits of the law, to use, exploit and dispose of his/her property.” (Article 768); “The owner of a property has the right to all its returns, products, and attachments unless a text or agreement states the contrary.” (Article 770).¹⁸

The Syrian Penal Code, issued by Legislative Decree No. 148 of 1949, states that seizing another's property without a legal reason is considered a crime of property usurpation. The Code sets the punishment of this crime's perpetrator as imprisonment for up to six months. It doubles the penalty to one-year imprisonment if the crime is accompanied by threat or coercion against the targeted property owner. It also increases prison time to three years if a group of two or more-armed people commits extortion. (Article 723). The same code states that anyone who enters another person's house or home or the outbuildings thereof against the other person's will shall be liable to a penalty of detention for a term of up to six months,

¹⁶ “Three Judicial Systems in Northern Syria: How Legitimate and Fair are They?”, joint report: Enab Baladi and Rozana, 22 November 2020, <https://www.enabbaladi.net/433596/%D8%AB%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AB%D8%A9-%D8%A3%D9%86%D8%B8%D9%85%D8%A9-%D9%82%D8%B6%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D9%85%D8%A7/#> (Last accessed: 17 September 2024).

¹⁷ The Syrian Constitution of 2012, available at: https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Syria_2012

¹⁸ The Syrian Civil Code of 1949, available at: <http://www.parliament.gov.sy/arabic/index.php?node=201&nid=12162&ref=tree&>

and the penalty shall be detention for a term of three months to three years if the act is committed at night, by breaking, through the use of violence against persons, by using weapons, or if it is committed by several persons acting in association. (Article 557). Almost all of these conditions, not just one, are present in the seizure cases mentioned in this report.¹⁹

According to the legal texts mentioned, the penalties outlined in Syrian law for violating property and housing rights do not match the seriousness of the crime. The Syrian legislator addressed these crimes as individual acts committed by one or more individuals against others without acknowledging the possibility of these violations occurring within an armed conflict, civil war, or similar circumstances as part of a systematic and widespread plan or policy. Additionally, Syrian courts do not consider international covenants and charters in the cases they handle, as Syrian laws do not prioritize international treaties over domestic laws. Furthermore, Syria is not a party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, so its courts do not apply the rules and penalties related to crimes such as war crimes and crimes against humanity, including violations affecting property rights and adequate housing.

2.3. Recommendations

Based on the information provided, it is clear that both international and local laws recognize the right to property and adequate housing as a fundamental human right that should be respected and protected. Upholding this right is essential for enabling displaced and homeless individuals to return to their original areas and supporting the implementation of UN Resolution 2254 of 2015. This resolution aims to facilitate political transition in Syria and end the era of dictatorship and armed conflict. Without ensuring the dignified and safe return of the displaced, it will be difficult to conduct free and fair elections that meet international standards for transparency and accountability. To address the violations mentioned in this report and minimize their devastating effects, STJ recommends a set of actions to be taken by Syrian, regional, and international stakeholders:

- **To the United Nations institutions and mechanisms, the European Union countries, and the United States of America:** we urge you to recognize the Turkish presence on Syrian territory as a clear case of occupation. We call on you to push Türkiye to fulfill its obligations as an occupying state according to the provisions of the Geneva Convention (IV), which relates to the protection of civilian persons in times of war. Additionally, we ask for your assistance in stopping the forced displacement of the population, which is aimed at perpetuating demographic change in the region. Furthermore, we request your support in providing a safe environment to ensure the voluntary and dignified return of the IDPs from the areas occupied by Türkiye to their original places of residence.
- **To the United States of America:** It is time to press Türkiye to uphold its duties as an occupying power and honor the commitments made in the agreement signed with you. This includes Türkiye’s commitment to not harming civilians and ensuring the safety and well-being of residents in the areas of Tell Abyad/Girê Spî and Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê.²⁰

¹⁹ The Syrian Penal Code, issued by Legislative Decree No. 148 of 1949, available at:

<http://jus.moj.gov.sy/ar/node/574>

²⁰ “Turkey’s Operation Peace Spring in northern Syria: One month on”, Al Jazeera, 8 November 2019,

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/11/8/turkeys-operation-peace-spring-in-northern-syria-one-month-on> (Last accessed: 17 September 2024).

- **To the international community; countries and organizations:** It is an ongoing imperative to collaborate with Syrian civil society organizations that are working to document the violations committed by the Turkish government and the SNA factions in the areas under Turkish occupation. Efforts should be made to compile a list of individuals and factions whose actions have been confirmed through human rights reports, particularly those issued by reputable institutions. The aim is to impose financial and banking sanctions on them and their supporters, whether they are countries or individuals, and to have them placed on the United Nations (UN) sanctions lists.
- **To the international community, especially the UN:** It is crucial to focus on the camps of IDPs from areas under Turkish occupation. They need adequate support that matches the scale of the tragedy they are facing due to their forced displacement by factions supported by Türkiye. Collaboration with local relief organizations is essential to provide this support.
- **To the Turkish government:** urgent actions must be taken to stop all violations in all occupied Syrian areas, restore rights to their owners, ensure and facilitate the return of all forcibly displaced persons to their homes, compel the military factions under your control to cease committing violations against civilians and their property, provide fair trials for those involved transparently and impartially, allow local and international human rights organizations to attend those trials, and not assign the investigation to committees formed by the factions involved in the violations, as happened with the Grievance Redress Committee in Afrin.
- **To the Civil society organizations, especially human rights:** it is incumbent to work relentlessly to document all violations, which may amount to war crimes or crimes against humanity, occurring in the areas of Turkish occupation. Educating victims about the importance of participating in documentation processes and preserving evidence and documents supporting their allegations is vital.
- **To the Syrian government:** it is crucial to work on amending laws related to property rights and adequate housing per international law standards that protect these rights. It is also essential to constitutionally stipulate the supremacy of international treaties and agreements to which Syria is a party over domestic laws and authorize national courts to apply the provisions of those treaties to cases before them. Additionally, adequate training should be provided for judges, lawyers, and law enforcement officials regarding severe violations of the right to housing and ensure their ability to apply these laws. Furthermore, to fulfill your duties towards citizens displaced from the areas of Turkish occupation, providing them with the necessary material support and necessary documents, whether personal or related to their lost property, is indisputable.
- **To the Syrian National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces and the SIG:** You have acknowledged that all factions operating in your areas are under the banner of the SIG’s Ministry of Defense.²¹ Thus, it is essential for the SIG to stop the violations committed by these factions, which have been documented in many human rights reports, especially in the reports of the COI-Syria. It is crucial to redress those affected by these violations, hold perpetrators accountable, and end impunity.

²¹ “The Ministry of Defense in the SIG is responsible for defense affairs and the SNA,” SIG -Ministry of Defense, <https://www.syriaig.net/ar/169/about> (last accessed: 17 September 2024).



Image 1: Civilians fleeing Operation Peace Spring launched by Türkiye and allied SNA factions in October 2019. Credit: STJ.

3. Methodology

For this report, STJ conducted extensive research between May and September 2024. We interviewed 38 individuals who were all displaced from the cities of Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tell Abyad/Girê Spî by Operation Peace Spring, which was launched by Turkish forces and allied SNA in October 2019. Among these interviewees were 23 IDPs from Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and 15 from Tell Abyad/Girê Spî, all of whom, or their relatives, suffered various forms of housing, land, and property rights violations or abuses linked to their property, including arrest and torture, threats of arrest, and financial extortion.

22 of the witnesses reside in different areas of al-Hasakah province in northeastern Syria, including the cities of al-Hasakah, Qamishli/Qamishlo, al-Malikiyah/Derik, and the town of Tell Tamer; 16 witnesses reside in al-Raqqa province, including in the Tell al-Samn IDP camp, and one in Germany. Notably, both al-Hasakah and Raqqa provinces are administratively under the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) and militarily under the SDF.

The interviews were conducted in Arabic and Kurdish. Eight took place online using secure communication applications, while the remaining 29 were conducted in person at locations considered safe and confidential by both the interviewees and the researchers. The sources were informed that the interviews were voluntary and were told how the information they provided would be used, including in this report. All sources chose to conceal their identities or any information that might lead to them for fear of reprisals against themselves or their relatives in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tell Abyad/Girê Spî by Turkish forces or affiliated factions. Therefore, STJ used pseudonyms to refer to the interviewees quoted in the report.

For this report, STJ also examined various open-source reports from UN organizations, human rights organizations, local and international media outlets, videos, photos, social media posts, and other documents provided to us by the interviewees.

4. Background

Five years ago, on 9 October 2019,²² Türkiye initiated a military operation code-named Operation Peace Spring in northeastern Syria. The operation targeted the areas Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tell Abyad/Girê Spî, which were previously held by the SDF. The Turkish forces were supported by around 1,400 fighters from different factions operating under the SNA which is affiliated with the SIG, an offshoot of the National Coalition.

The hostilities lasted for approximately 10 days and came to a halt due to a truce brokered between Türkiye and the United States. As part of the truce, the SDF forces retreated 30 kilometers from a strip along the 120-kilometer border with Türkiye, effectively granting control of the area to the Turkish forces and the SNA factions.²³

During the operation, the area experienced indiscriminate shelling by Turkish forces and allied SNA factions. This was accompanied by extrajudicial killings,²⁴ and widespread violations of property rights. As a result of the operation, over 200,000 residents were displaced,²⁵ with

²² “Erdogan Announces the Launch of Operation Peace Spring in Northern Syria”, Anadolu Agency, 9 October 2019, <https://www.aa.com.tr/ar/%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%8A%D8%A7/%D8%A3%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%BA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%8A%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%B9%D9%85%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%86%D8%A8%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A8%D8%B4%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7/1607177> (Last accessed: 26 August 2024).

²³ “Turkey’s Operation Peace Spring in northern Syria: One month on”, Al Jazeera, 8 November 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/11/8/turkeys-operation-peace-spring-in-northern-syria-one-month-on> (Last accessed: 17 September 2024).

²⁴ “New Evidence Pointing to Ahrar al-Sharqiya’s Responsibility for Field Executions in Suluk during “Operation Peace Spring”” STJ, 27 January 2020, <https://stj-sy.org/en/new-evidence-pointing-to-ahrar-al-sharqiyas-responsibility-for-field-executions-in-suluk-during-operation-peace-spring/> (last accessed: 26 August 2024); See also, “Syria: Damning evidence of war crimes and other violations by Turkish forces and their allies”, Amnesty International, 18 October 2019, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2019/10/syria-damning-evidence-of-war-crimes-and-other-violations-by-turkish-forces-and-their-allies/> (Last accessed: 27 August 2024).

²⁵ “Displacement and Despair: The Turkish Invasion of Northeast Syria”, Refugees International, 12 November 2019, <https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports-briefs/displacement-and-despair-the-turkish-invasion-of-northeast-syria/> (Last accessed: 27 August 2024).

only around 20,000 having returned so far, according to reports from the Synergy/Hevdestî Association for Victims.²⁶

Hence, Türkiye has achieved its goal of weakening the Kurdish presence along its borders.²⁷ It is relevant to recall that Türkiye considers the People’s Protection Units (YPG), a major component of the Kurdish-led and US-backed SDF, to be an extension of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) in Syria, which it classifies as a terrorist organization.

Türkiye currently exercises effective control over the cities of Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tell Abyad/Girê Spî through its military presence in over 41 military points and bases.²⁸ This control is also exercised through its proxy, the SNA, which Türkiye supports financially, militarily, and logistically.²⁹ Turkish forces and many of its allied SNA factions have taken over the homes of displaced civilians and turned them into military headquarters.³⁰ Türkiye directly supervises service sectors such as education and health through the governor’s office of Şanlıurfa province in southeast Türkiye,³¹ located at the borders of the two cities. Additionally, supervision is carried out through two local councils in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tell Abyad/Girê Spî.³²

Following Türkiye’s takeover, the region has experienced significant demographic changes that have impacted its ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity.³³ Approximately 70% of the population of Tell Abyad/Girê Spî, estimated at 129,000 people, were displaced. Arabs comprised half of this population, while Kurds comprised around 30% to 40%, with small Turkmen and Armenian minorities also present. In the meantime, 85% of the population of Ras

²⁶ According to an official correspondence with the management of the Synergy/Hevdestî Association for Victims in September 2024.

²⁷ “Everything is by the Power of the Weapon”, HRW, 29 February 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/02/29/everything-power-weapon/abuses-and-impunity-turkish-occupied-northern-syria> (Last accessed: 27 August 2024).

²⁸ “Turkish forces send reinforcements to Syria’s Tel Abyad”, North Press Agency, 4 October 2023, <https://npasyria.com/en/105525/> (Last accessed: 27 August 2024).

²⁹ “Syrian National Army: Our salaries and weapons come from Turkey when necessary” (in Turkish), Euro News, 12 August 2018, <https://tr.euronews.com/2018/08/12/-suriye-milli-ordusu-maasimiz-ve-gerektiginde-silahimiz-turkiye-den> (Last accessed: 27 August 2024).

³⁰ “Housing, Land, and Property Rights Violations in Ras al-Ayn-Serê Kaniyê and Tal Abyad after 2019”, PÊL-Civil Waves, 25 January 2024, <https://pel-cw.org/en/16584/> (Last accessed: 6 September 2024).

³¹ “The Gangs of Northern Syria: Life Under Turkey’s Proxies”, New Lines Institute, 7 December 2022, <https://newlinesinstitute.org/state-resilience-fragility/civil-military-relations/the-gangs-of-northern-syria-life-under-turkeys-proxies/> (Last accessed: 8 September 2024).

³² “Syria’s Ras al-Ayn: Establishing a Local Council to Manage the City’s Affairs”, Anadolu Agency, 7 November 2019, <https://www.aa.com.tr/ar/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9/%D8%B1%D8%A3%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%A3%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B3-%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3-%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%84%D9%8A-%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%B4%D8%A4%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A9/1638758> (Last accessed: 8 September 2024).

³³ “Syrian Arab Republic: Thematic Humanitarian Access Snapshot (Ras Al Ain-Tell Abiad Area) November 2022”, Relief Web, 18 December 2022, <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/syrian-arab-republic-thematic-humanitarian-access-snapshot-ras-al-ain-tell-abiad-area-november-2022> (Last accessed: 28 August 2024).

al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tell Abyad/Girê Spî, out of a population of 160,000, were displaced;³⁴ the Kurds became a minority there after their number exceeded 75,000 people,³⁵ leaving less than 50 Kurds and seven Christians in the city, while a minimal number of Yazidis returned, with no presence of other ethnic and religious groups³⁶.

The significant changes in the area are mainly due to the fact that those who were forced to leave are unable to return because of the lack of law and order and the prevalence of impunity. Turkish forces and allied SNA factions have been found to commit serious violations of the rights of the residents who stayed in the area and those who returned.³⁷ STJ and partner organizations have documented 62 cases of arbitrary arrest and detention, which included torture and other cruel treatments, all aimed at intimidating residents and forcing them to leave the area and abandon their properties, mainly the Kurds.³⁸ The COI-Syria’s latest report, issued on 12 August 2024,³⁹ confirmed these violations, including an incident where a Kurdish woman was slapped during her interrogation by the civilian police, who are affiliated with the SNA, in the town of Mabrouka in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê. A previous report by the COI-Syria, issued in July 2023,⁴⁰ also documented cases that could be considered enforced disappearances.

The region also saw Turkification operations,⁴¹ with Turkish military forces and their affiliated Syrian factions raising the Turkish flag in the two cities.⁴² Subsequently, Turkish relief organizations such as the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD), the Turkish Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH), and the Turkish Red Crescent entered the region, and the use of the Turkish lira was imposed.⁴³

³⁴ “Operation Peace Spring: Its Impact on Displaced Persons and Civilians”, The Syrian Women’s Political Movement, 17 October 2023, <https://syrianwomenpm.org/statements/operation-peace-spring-its-impact-on-displaced-persons-and-civilians/> (Last accessed: 27 August 2024).

³⁵ “Syria: Role of International Agreements in Forced Displacement (3)”, STJ, 19 October 2023, <https://stj-sy.org/en/syria-role-of-international-agreements-in-forced-displacement-3/> (Last accessed: 27 August 2024).

³⁶ According to statistics from STJ and correspondence with the Synergy/Hevdestî Association for Victims in September 2024.

³⁷ “Ras Al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tall Abyad: Four Years of Occupation and Record Rife with Human Rights Violations”, The Synergy/Hevdestî Association for Victims, 9 October 2023, <https://hevdesti.org/en/4-years-since-the-occupation-of-ras-alayn-and-tall-abypad/> (Last accessed: 8 September 2024).

³⁸ “Torture in the Peace Spring Strip: A Tool for Persecution and the Perpetuation of Forced Displacement”, STJ, a joint report by STJ and Synergy/Hevdestî Association for Victims, 26 June 2023, <https://stj-sy.org/en/torture-in-the-peace-spring-strip-a-tool-for-persecution-and-the-perpetuation-of-forced-displacement/> (Last accessed: 8 September 2024).

³⁹ Report of COI-Syria (A/HRC/57/86), 12 August 2024, paras. 81 and 82.

⁴⁰ “No End in Sight: Torture and ill-treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic 2020-2023”(A/HRC/53/CRP.5), COI-Syria, 10 July 2023, paras. 94-105;

See also: “Northeast Syria: More than 120 People Disappeared Following Operation Peace Spring”, a joint report by STJ and Synergy/Hevdestî Association for Victims, 28 March 2022, <https://stj-sy.org/en/northeast-syria-more-than-120-people-disappeared-following-operation-peace-spring/> (Last accessed: 8 September 2024).

⁴¹ “Sere Kaniye and Tel Abyad: 4 years of rights violations”, North Press Agency, 11 October 2023, <https://npasyria.com/en/106072/> (Last accessed: 6 September 2024).

⁴² Ceremony of raising the flag of the blessed Syrian revolution and the Turkish flag in the city of #Ras al-Ayn, rural al-Hasakah, The Northern Hawks Brigade, 31 August 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P4xr21OPgo0> (Last accessed: (Last accessed: 8 September 2024).

⁴³ “Syria: Role of International Agreements in Forced Displacement (3)”, STJ, 19 October 2023, <https://stj-sy.org/en/syria-role-of-international-agreements-in-forced-displacement-3/> (Last accessed: 8 September 2024).

In 2022, Suleiman Soyulu, the former Turkish Minister of Interior, visited Tell Abyad/Girê Spî to inspect the housing unit construction project in the so-called "safe zone." This project aimed to resettle Syrian refugees in Türkiye,⁴⁴ which was one of the objectives of Operation Peace Spring. In 2023, Türkiye designated Tell Abyad/Girê Spî as a primary destination for a larger number of Syrians forcibly deported from its lands under the heading of "voluntary return."⁴⁵ STJ documented the deportation of 12,016 refugees to the region during the first seven months of 2024.⁴⁶

The ongoing violations of property rights are a significant factor in altering the demographic makeup of the region and perpetuating forced displacement. This is happening in the absence of any genuine and transparent efforts to restore rights to the rightful owners. The Synergy/Hevdestî Association for Victims has documented the settlement of at least 55 families, including women and children of Islamic State (IS) fighters, most of whom are Iraqis, in homes seized in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê⁴⁷.

These violations contravene several provisions of the US-Turkish ceasefire agreement signed after the military operation. This includes Article 4, which mandates the protection of religious and ethnic communities, and Article 7, in which Türkiye pledges not to harm civilians and to ensure the safety and well-being of the region's residents.⁴⁸

Images 2-3-4: Maps created by STJ illustrate the locations of the Turkish army, police, and gendarmerie in the “Peace Spring” areas. These locations were fully active until 2023. However, due to the lack of recent satellite images of all locations, we could not confirm their effectiveness during 2024. Image No. 2 displays the spread of the SNA factions; the locations were determined according to a map created by the Synergy/Hevdestî Association for Victims. Image No. 3 illustrates the locations of both the Turkish Army and the SNA. Please see the annex for the exact locations of some of these points, which are, in total, 68 military points.

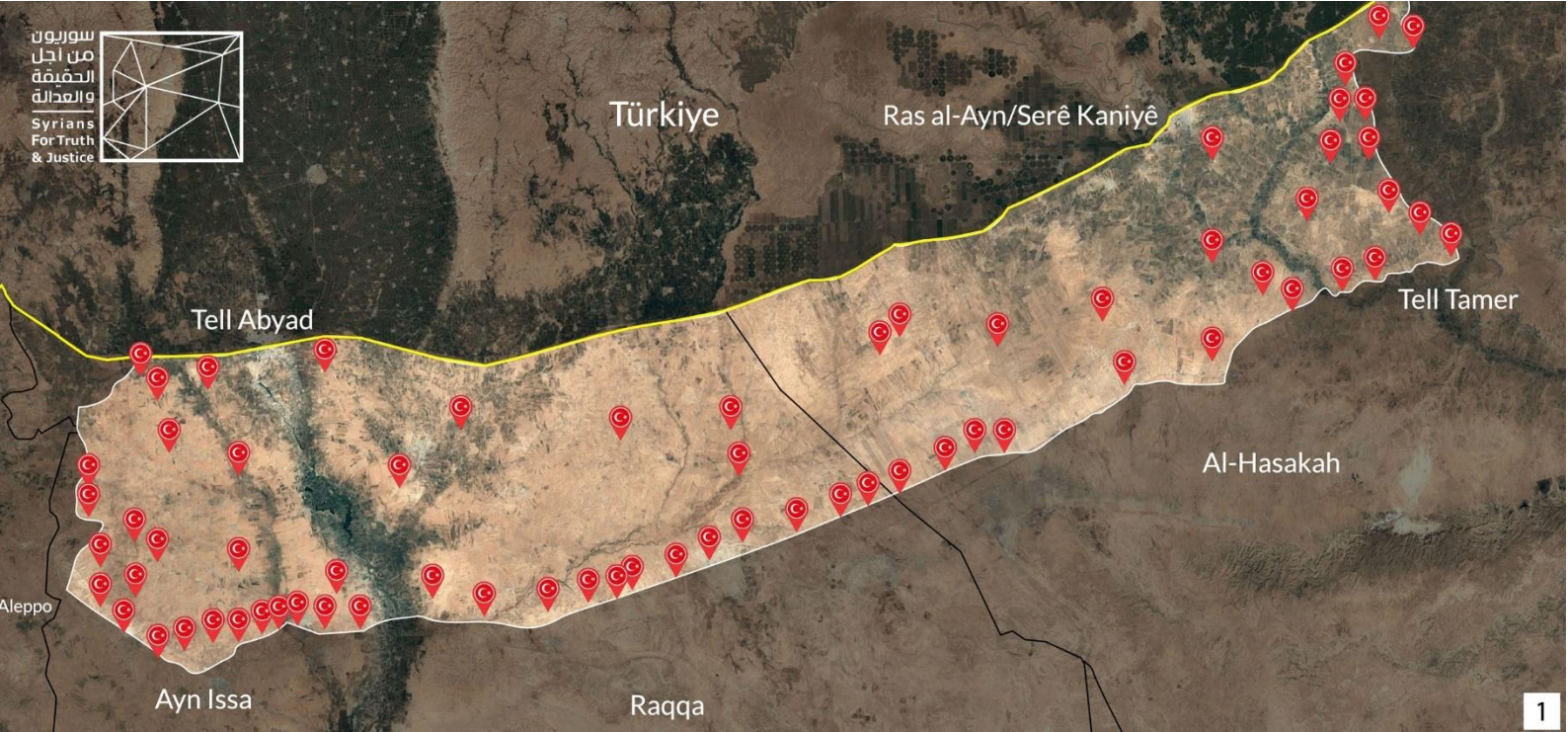
⁴⁴ “Turkish Minister inspects housing construction project in Syria's Tell Abyad”, Anadolu Agency, 19 June 2022, <https://www.aa.com.tr/ar/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9/%D9%88%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%AA%D9%81%D9%82%D8%AF-%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B9-%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%83%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%AA%D9%84-%D8%A3%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%B6-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9/2616910> (Last accessed: 8 September 2024).

⁴⁵ “Syrians Face Dire Conditions in Turkish-Occupied ‘Safe Zone’”, HRW, 28 March 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/03/28/syrians-face-dire-conditions-turkish-occupied-safe-zone> (Last accessed: 8 September 2024).

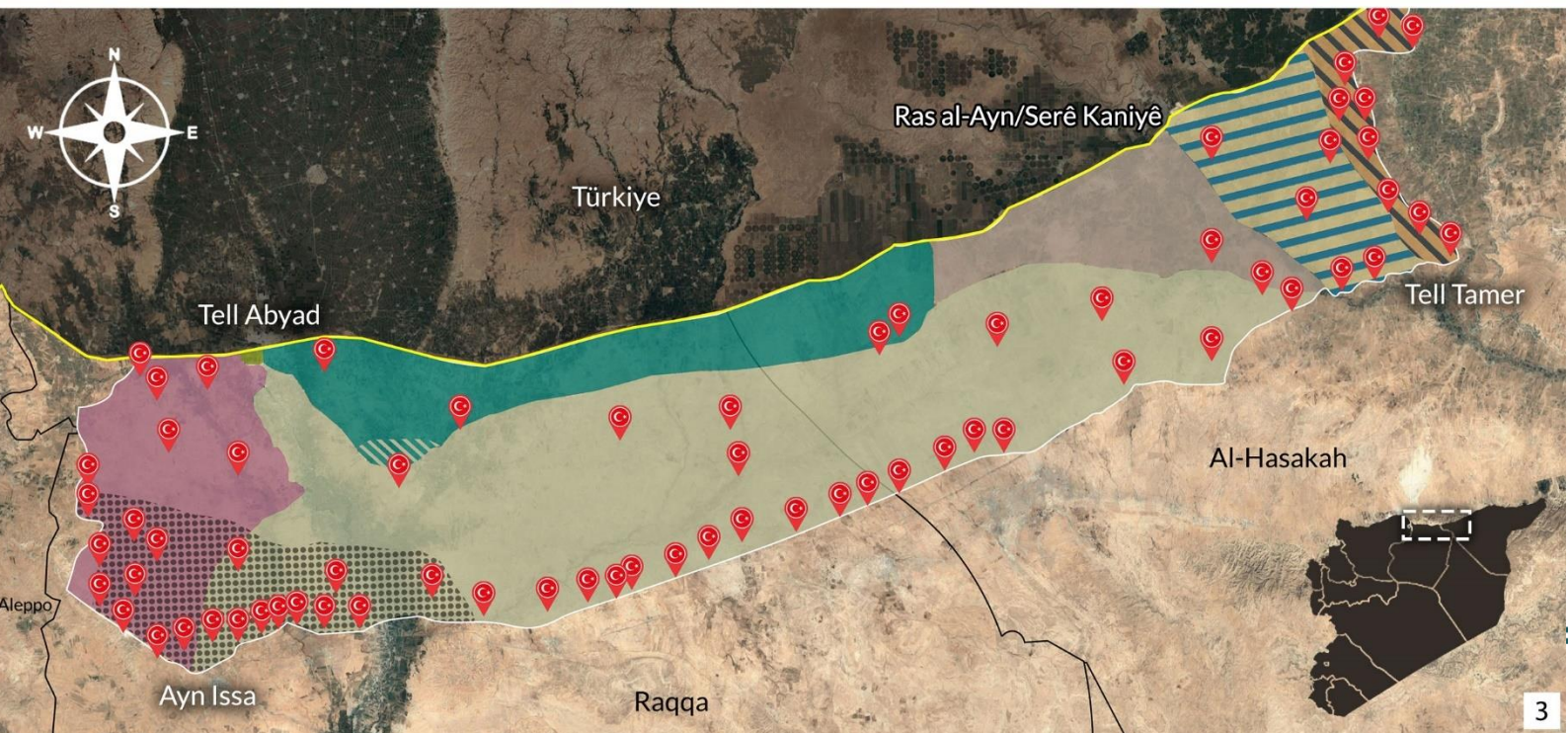
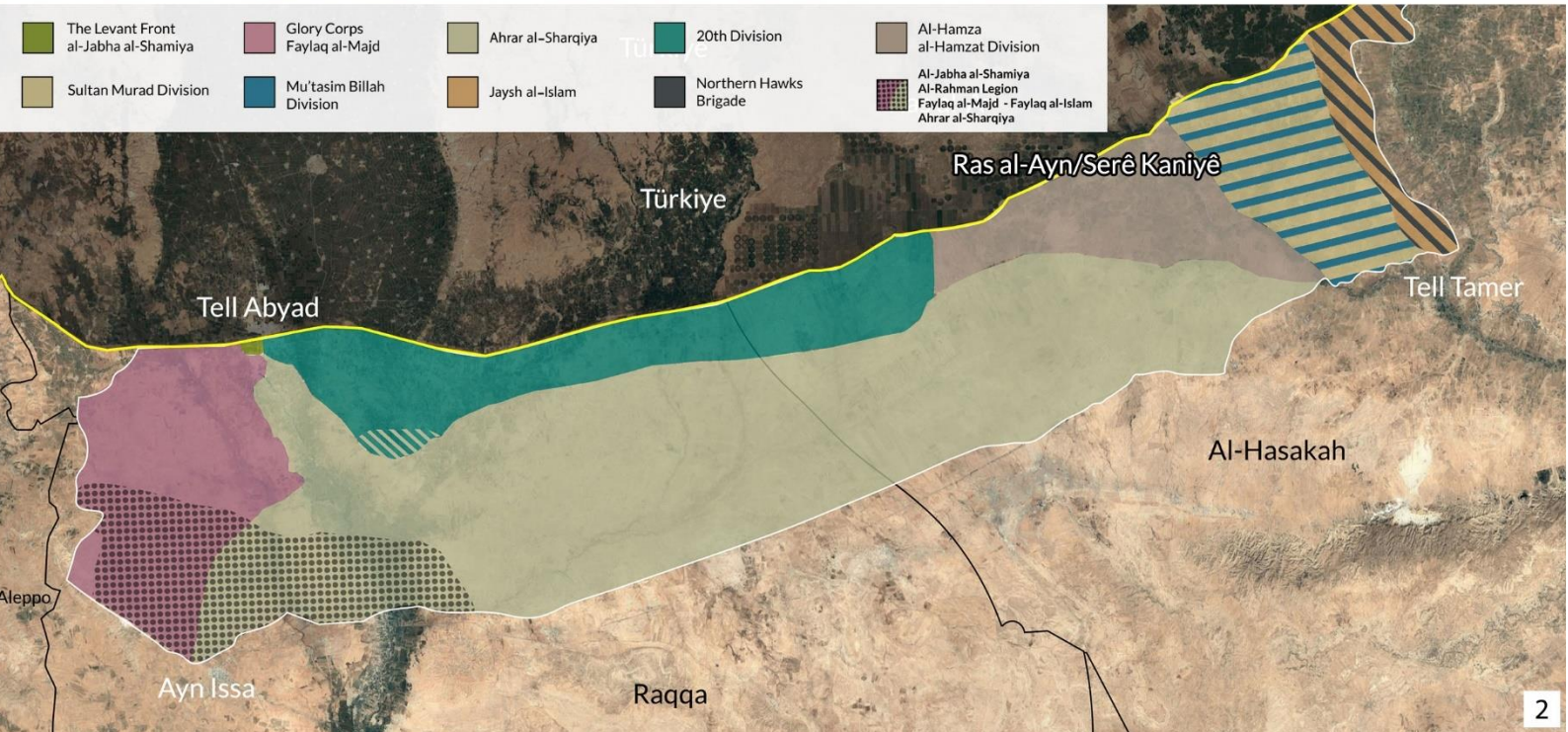
⁴⁶ “Türkiye: Misleading Statements by Foreign Minister Regarding Forced Return of Syrian Refugees”, STJ, 22 August 2024, <https://stj-sy.org/en/turkiye-misleading-statements-by-foreign-minister-regarding-forced-return-of-syrian-refugees/> (Last accessed: 8 September 2024).

⁴⁷ “Where is My Home: Property Rights Violations in Northern Syria Perpetuate Demographic Change”, the Synergy/Hevdestî Association for Victims, 25 January 2023, <https://hevdesti.org/en/violations-of-property-rights-in-northern-syria/> (Last accessed: 8 September 2024).

⁴⁸ “The United States and Turkey Agree to Ceasefire in Northeast Syria”, The White House, 17 October 2019, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/united-states-turkey-agree-ceasefire-northeast-syria/> (Last accessed: 8 September 2024).



- | | | | | |
|---|-------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|--|
| The Levant Front
al-Jabha al-Shamiya | Glory Corps
Faylaq al-Majd | Ahrar al-Sharqiya | 20th Division | Al-Hamza
al-Hamzat Division |
| Sultan Murad Division | Mu'tasim Billah
Division | Jaysh al-Islam | Northern Hawks
Brigade | Al-Jabha al-Shamiya
Al-Rahman Legion
Faylaq al-Majd - Faylaq al-Islam
Ahrar al-Sharqiya |



5. Housing, Land, Property Rights Violations

“The house is yours; donate it to us!”

Abdulaal Misto, a Kurdish displaced from Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê, quoted a fighter who settled in his home after Operation Peace Spring.

Through 38 interviews, STJ documented property rights violations, involving at least 62 homes, 52 shops, warehouses, factories, and 19 plots of agricultural land, covering an estimated 4,747 hectares (47.47 square kilometers). Notably, some of the land was cultivated before the Turkish incursion in 2019. Additionally, a large amount of agricultural and industrial equipment and tons of stored seeds for planting were also destroyed.⁴⁹ These violations occurred immediately after the incursion and at different periods of Turkish control over the area.

28 sources identified violators, including factions, leaders, civilians, and families associated with the SNA. Five individuals mentioned that the violators were members of the SNA without specifying further. One reported the involvement of a civilian affiliated with the Turkish forces, while another stated the participation of Turkish troops. An additional source indicated that the violators were from the “Free Army,” the former designation of the SNA.

Most sources, apart from a few returnees, obtained the information they shared from neighbors, relatives, or friends who remained in their villages. Some mentioned that they are reluctant to communicate with acquaintances who have not been displaced for fear of potential retaliation from the controlling factions or the Turkish forces.

5.1. Seizure of homes for military or residential purposes

All the interviewees confirmed that their homes were either used as military posts or to house members of different factions, their families, or civilians linked to them. In two cases, the parties that seized the homes of the displaced sold them to third parties.

On the second day of the military operation, Kurdish car dealer Juan Abdul Baqi, 42,⁵⁰ was forced out of his home in the al-Kharabat neighborhood in the city of Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê. He described the incident, saying,

“We saw about twenty armed individuals in military uniforms with long hair and beards, speaking Arabic. They entered the houses in the neighborhood, including mine. When I approached them and informed them that I was the home's owner, they said they would use it as a military point. I later found out that they belong to the Ahrar al-Sharqiya faction.⁵¹ They confiscated all the contents of my house, including furniture and electrical appliances, and threatened me with force of arms.”

⁴⁹ “Following Operation Peace Spring, Thousands of Tons of Grain Seized as Spoils of War”, STJ, 22 June 2020, <https://stj-sy.org/en/following-operation-peace-spring-thousands-of-tons-of-grain-seized-as-spoils-of-war/> (Last accessed: 17 September 2024).

⁵⁰ STJ's field researcher physically interviewed the witness on 13 May 2024.

⁵¹ Established in January 2016, led by Ahmed Ihsan Fayyad al-Hais, better known as Abu Hatem Shakra, a naturalized Turkish, this faction is a part of the 1st Corps of the SNA and has taken part in all operations conducted by the Turkish army in Syria. In 2021, the US Treasury placed the faction and its leader on the sanctions list due to their involvement in numerous crimes against civilians, particularly Kurds. These crimes include unlawful killing, kidnapping, torture, and seizure of private property. See: “Treasury Sanctions Syrian Regime Prisons, Officials, and Syrian Armed Group”, U.S. Department of the

The next day, Juan returned to his house to get supplies for his family. However, a guard sat in front of his home, holding a Kalashnikov, a bag of grenades, and magazines. The guard told Juan, “Get out of my sight, or I will lock you up in the house.” As a result, Juan fled the city and has been living in the town of Tell Tamer ever since.

Abdul Aal Misto, a 61-year-old displaced Kurdish farmer from Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê,⁵² was also expelled and prevented from entering his home in the al-Mahta neighborhood when he returned to the city at the end of November 2019 by members of the Northern Hawks Brigade.⁵³ Abdul Aal recounted that when he went to his home with neighbors,

“As we knocked on the door, a man in a military uniform came out and asked us, ‘What do you want?’ I explained that I was the owner of the house and that I had returned to live in my home. Meanwhile, another soldier emerged, holding a machine gun, and fired several bullets between our feet. He started shouting, cursing, and insulting me, saying, ‘You dogs and son of dogs, you are [PKK] party affiliates, and you want houses! The house is yours; donate it to us!’”

Abdul Aal stated that on that day, he fled because he feared being killed. Three people who had taken over his home came to him at the neighbor's house and demanded one million Syrian pounds (SP) in order to return his home to him. Abdul Aal added,

“I told them that I did not have the money to pay. They started pressuring me, citing that my son was a soldier with the SDF. Then negotiations began, and we agreed on 150,000 SP. I paid, but they did not leave my home. I asked them to honor the agreement, but that same night, they raided the place I was in, put a gun to my head, and threatened to kill me. After a while of threats and intimidation, they left. Then, I realized that I lost everything.”

Abdul Aal fled to Qamishli/Qamishlo that day and has lived there with his family since then. He mentioned that the incident led him to give up asking about the six shops he owned on the Tell Halaf road and to abandon his agricultural project, which had several agricultural machines seized by the al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division,⁵⁴ as told by his neighbors.

Treasury, 28 July 2021, <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0292> (Last accessed: 11 September 2024).

⁵² STJ's field researcher physically interviewed the witness on 11 May 2024.

⁵³ Established in early September 2012 in Zawiya Mountain/Jabal al-Zawiya, Idlib, and is currently led by Hassan Haj Ali, better known as Hassan al-Khairiya. The brigade, which is part of the 2nd Corps of the SNA, consists of 2,500 fighters and is deployed in Idlib, the eastern and western countryside of Aleppo, the countryside of Hama, and the countryside of Latakia. Additionally, its members are present in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê. The brigade participated in the Euphrates Shield and Olive Branch operations alongside the Turkish army.

⁵⁴ Established in April 2016 and led by Saif Abu Bakr, a naturalized Turkish, this division is a part of the 2nd Corps of the SNA. It is stationed in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê, al-Bab, and the surrounding areas in eastern Aleppo, as well as in Jarabulus, al-Ghandoura, al-Rai, Hawar Kilis, Afrin, and its respective outskirts. The division has been involved in all military operations initiated by the Turkish army in Syria. In 2023, the US Treasury imposed sanctions on the division and its commander due to their involvement in severe human rights violations in northern Syria, which include kidnapping, inflicting serious physical harm, and rape. See: “Designating Two Syrian Factions and Their Leaders in Connection with Serious Human Rights Abuses”, U.S. Department of State, 17 August 2023, <https://www.state.gov/designating-two-syrian-factions-and-their-leaders-in-connection-with-serious-human-rights-abuses/> (Last accessed: 11 September 2024).

Fadel Musa,⁵⁵ a 34-year-old Kurdish farmer displaced with his extended family from Tell Abyad/Girê Spî, said,

“Friends and neighbors who remained in the area informed me that Turkish forces turned our homes into institutions affiliated with them. My brother's guest house was transformed into the Civil Registry, supervised by a Turkish coordinator or advisor. Anyone wanting to go to Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê, for example, had to go to this Registry and obtain a transit paper.”

Fadel explained that when the factions took control of the village, his second brother's house was turned into a temporary prison for initial investigations. Later, the prisoners were moved elsewhere. His third brother's home was transformed into a maintenance garage for cars and machinery; however, it was later vacated and occupied by the so-called Abu Omar al-Safrani, who also has investments in their agricultural lands.

Two different groups took over the home of Jawhar Darwish,⁵⁶ a 55-year-old Arab teacher who lived in the al-Arman neighborhood in Tell Abyad/Girê Spî. In May 2024, he was told by someone remaining in the city that the Levant Front/al-Jabha al-Shamiya had sold his home to the Tajammu Ahrar al-Sharqiya/Gathering of Free Men of the East.⁵⁷ A member of the latter group now resides in his house with his family. Jawhar fled the city after members of one of the SNA factions arrested him and his two sons on the day the fighting began. They were held in one of the faction-controlled prisons for six hours, accused of being “shabiha” (supporters) of the SDF.

Hassan Abdul Hamid,⁵⁸ a 43-year-old Kurdish man displaced from Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê, received a photo about a year ago from a friend who remained in the city. The photo showed the outer wall of his house, located on Khawla bint al-Azwar Street, with the phrase “family residence” and the name of a family that had taken over the house. Hassan confirmed that this family is linked to the Sultan Murad Division and still lives in his home.⁵⁹ Hassan learned from people he communicated with after his displacement that those who took control of their neighborhood arrived in cars carrying banners that read “Sultan Murad.”

⁵⁵ STJ's field researcher physically interviewed the witness on 11 May 2024.

⁵⁶ STJ's field researcher physically interviewed the witness on 1 June 2024.

⁵⁷ The Levant Front/al-Jabha al-Shamiya group was formed in 2014 through the merger of several major armed factions in Aleppo, including the Nour al-Din al-Zenki Brigades, Army of Mujahideen, Islamic Front, Fastaqim Kama Umirt Gathering, Authenticity and Development Front, and Suqour al-Sham. Currently, the front is led by Azzam al-Gharib, better known as Abu al-Ezz Saraqib, who hails from the movement of Muhannad al-Khalaf (Abu Ahmed Nour), the former faction commander. The Front members comprise the largest part of the 3rd Corps in the SNA. The faction has control over the entire city of A'zaz but was previously expelled from the city of Afrin after clashes with Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). The Front participated in all military operations launched by the Turkish army in Syria.

⁵⁸ STJ's field researcher physically interviewed the witness on 10 May 2024.

⁵⁹ The Sultan Murad Division was established in March 2015 and is led by Fahim Issa, a naturalized Turkish. The Division is part of the 2nd Corps of the SNA and has been involved in all military operations conducted by the Turkish army in Syria. It is deployed in all areas controlled by the Turkish army. What sets this division apart from others founded by Ankara is that it includes a significant number of members from the Turkmen community. Additionally, it is known for hosting the former Turkish Interior Minister, Suleyman Soyulu, on several occasions in Syria.

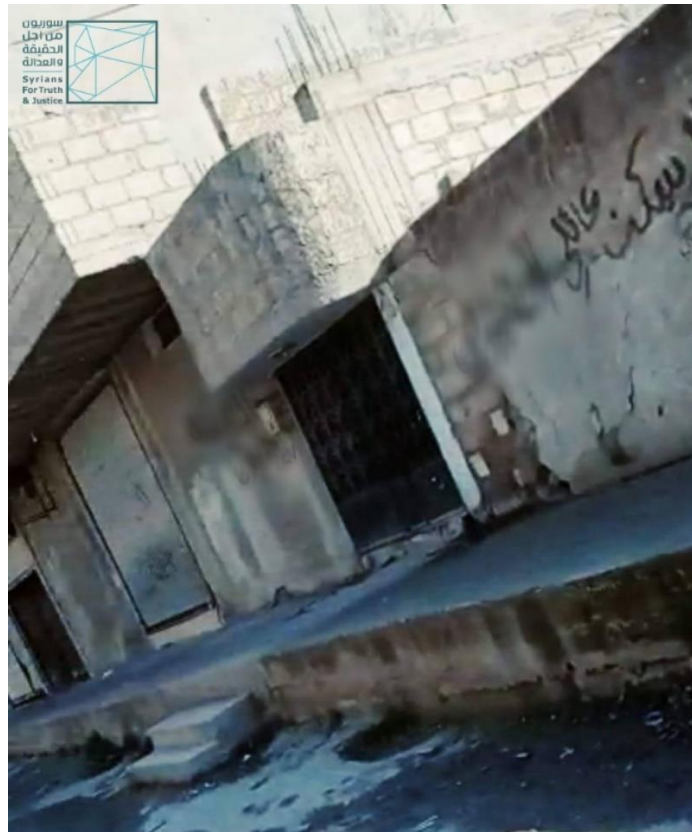


Image 5: A photo provided by the displaced Hassan Abdul Hamid showing his seized home.

5.2. Looting following seizure

Many of the witnesses interviewed by STJ reported that their properties were taken by force and then looted. One is Rawan Mahmoud, a 62-year-old Kurdish housewife forced to leave her home in Ras al-Ayn/ Serê Kaniyê.⁶⁰ About a week after being displaced to the city of al-Hasakah, where she still lives, she returned to her home on al-Madrasah al-Sharqiyah Street. However, she found that the door lock had been changed. The soldier who seized the house prevented her from entering on the first day, threatened her with a weapon, and forced her to leave. On the next day, Rawan attempted to enter again, and the soldier allowed her to do so after she paid 50,000 SP. She was shocked to see that her house had been looted. Rawan explained,

“It was looted. They did not leave any of our belongings behind, including electrical appliances, food supplies, a plasma screen, and an Arabic divan. I asked the soldier where my household items were, and he said shamelessly, 'I do not know; maybe people came before us and stole them. Now the time is up, get out, you Kurds, you dogs.'”

⁶⁰ STJ’s field researcher physically interviewed the witness on 2 July 2024.

Rowan believes that this person is associated with the Ahrar al-Sharqiya faction because, during her visit, she overheard people loudly speaking Arabic and claiming, “This neighborhood is ours, we are Ahrar al-Sharqiya.”

Nader Salama,⁶¹ a 54-year-old Kurdish food merchant who was displaced to the city of Qamishli/Qamishlo, said that he returned to the city of Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê after about two months and ten days in the hope of recovering his shop and home. However, he found that his home had been completely looted and taken over by a leader named Shaaban Mohammed, who is linked to the al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division. Nader detailed,

“All of my home belongings were sold by a person named Shaaban Mohammed. When I tried to buy them back from him, he refused and instead offered to sell me other belongings that he had. He admitted to selling all of my furniture and belongings in a market in the city of Tell Abyad/Girê Spî. According to my neighbors, they saw a large transport vehicle being used to move my furniture to another place.”

Nader confirmed that, during his brief visit, he witnessed members of the controlling factions looting houses and selling furniture. They were either selling the items in the Tell Halaf market in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê or transporting them to Tell Abyad/Girê Spî and selling them in a market they had established called the Ras al-Ayn Spoils Market. Nader later found out that the leader sold his house to a man from Hama for \$1,000, and he currently lives in it with his family.

Sultan al-Hassan,⁶² a 39-year-old Kurdish teacher displaced from the village of Salihiye in the city of Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê, now lives in Qamishli/Qamishlo. He mentioned that his home is currently uninhabitable, with its roof destroyed and supporting columns removed. Arab neighbors who returned to their neighboring village informed him that the “Free Army” had taken over his home. Sultan recounted,

“They completely looted our houses and left nothing behind. They used bulldozers to remove the wall made of blocks and the linden trees, and they opened a road to the house. According to our neighbors, they turned our house into a warehouse where they stored the stolen goods looted from the nearby villages. A neighbor from a nearby village even mentioned that when he returned and asked about the furniture in his house, they took him to my house and sold him back his own furniture. After buying the furniture, he returned and left everything behind because he could not live with them (meaning the armed military factions).”

The looting also affected 28 properties, including factories, shops, and restaurants owned by Fakhri Abdul Latif, a 52-year-old Kurdish food merchant displaced from Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê.⁶³ He stated that most of his properties are located in areas controlled by the al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division or have been seized by the faction itself or the al-Mawali Battalion affiliated. He added that the Turkish forces are using the warehouses of the bulgur factory that he owns, located on the Tell Halaf -Ras al-Ayn road. Fakhri added,

⁶¹ STJ’s field researcher physically interviewed the witness on 8 May 2024.

⁶² STJ’s field researcher physically interviewed the witness on 6 June 2024.

⁶³ STJ’s field researcher physically interviewed the witness on 8 July 2024.

“Initially, there were instances of looting and theft at the factory. However, the Hamzat faction eventually gained control, with Abu Abdo al-Boushi from al-Bab taking charge. Al-Boushi, who had industrial tendencies, aimed to run the factory and thus prevented further looting. Indeed, he resumed the factory and produced bulgur. However, he was dismissed and expelled a year ago. Between his expulsion and the arrival of a new group to take over the factory, a significant amount of the factory's equipment was looted. They stole lightweight and expensive items, including electrical cables, circuit breakers, and electrical and electronic components. The cables alone are valued at around \$80,000.”

Looting incidents were also reported in the city of Tell Abyad/Girê Spî, affecting Saleh Naasan,⁶⁴ a 35-year-old Arab real estate office owner who now lives in Raqqa after being displaced from his home in the village of Kormazah. He had entrusted his home to his uncle before leaving the city. Saleh said,

“When the SNA entered the village and approached the house, my uncle told them that the house belonged to his nephew and that he had the key, so they would not have to break the door. However, they attacked my uncle, threw the key from his hands to the ground, beat him, and pushed him until he fell. Then they broke the door of the house using a tank barrel, entered it, and stole all its contents in front of my uncle's eyes.”

A few days after the looting, a battalion of the Northern Brigade led by Abu Abdullah al-Zarba took over Saleh's house and used it as a military headquarters for several months.⁶⁵ Later, the house was handed over to a member of the SNA named Abu Saif al-Libi from Deir ez-Zor. He and his family continued to live in the house until the time of the interview.

5.3. Blackmailing displaced owners

At least five of the interviewees or their relatives were victims of financial extortion over the phone related to their property. One of the victims was the brother of Othman Mustafa,⁶⁶ a 33-year-old Kurdish music teacher who was displaced from the village of Ayn Hisan in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê with his extended family. Othman's brother was contacted multiple times by someone who identified himself as Abu Hamza from the al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division. The caller claimed to know his family and stated that members of the Division were occupying their homes. Othman recounted,

“He told my brother, 'Your files are clean. Go back home, and we will protect you.' [He said that my brother] could move between the areas under their control and the areas controlled by the SDF. However, he must work with them, pass on information, and provide details about where the SDF hides its ammunition in the city of Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê.”

⁶⁴ STJ's field researcher physically interviewed the witness on 30 May 2024.

⁶⁵ Founded in April 2017, led by Mustafa al-Maarati from the 1st Corps of the SNA, mainly deployed in Jarabulus with forces in Tell Abyad/Girê Spî.

⁶⁶ STJ's field researcher physically interviewed the witness on 9 June 2024.

After being displaced from Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê, 59-year-old Kurdish merchant Suleiman al-Ali,⁶⁷ received a call from the person living in his house on the al-Hasakah road. Suleiman explained,

“He asked me to buy him a van engine worth \$1,100, but I refused and told him I did not have the money. After I refused his request, he said, 'Know that your house will meet the same fate as your shop.' He was referring to the looting of my shop in the industrial area. After they looted my shop and emptied it of its merchandise, they burned it down with a firebomb.”

Suleiman claimed that the man who called him was affiliated with the Sultan Murad Division and that his house was used as a military headquarters for a brief period before being handed over to this person.

In June 2023, Nasser Haji,⁶⁸ a 47-year-old displaced Kurd from Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê received a video call via the Messenger application from a person who called himself Hassan al-Domani on Facebook.

“He turned the camera toward my house, opened the courtyard door, and went inside to show me the house's interior. He first entered my brother's apartment and told me he lived there. Then he went to my house; I did not see any doors or windows, and even the ceiling columns had been removed. Then he started threatening me, saying that if I did not transfer \$2,000, he would blow up the house. I tried to find the account he contacted me from but could not find it; its name has changed to “Facebook user”.

Friends in the city informed Nasser that a family from Deir ez-Zor, with ties to an unidentified armed faction, had taken over his house in the al-Mahta neighborhood.

Hamed Jamil,⁶⁹ a 46-year-old Arab electrician displaced from Tell Abyad/Girê Spî, stated that he received a call less than a month after his displacement from an individual who had arrived with the Turkish army and was a member of the SNA. The caller told him to return to his home, assuring him that he would not be harmed, but on the condition that he hand over the car of the Women's House (the Kongra Star/the Star Conference). Prior to his displacement, Hamed worked as a driver for the Women's House affiliated with the AANES. Hamed mentioned that a person from Tell Abyad/Girê Spî is currently settling in his house without paying rent.

5.4. Illegal land investment

Many IDPs are unable to access their property, especially in villages completely under military control. At least five of those we interviewed said their agricultural lands were being illegally exploited. For example, Shiyar Yousef,⁷⁰ a 57-year-old Kurdish farmer displaced from Ras al-

⁶⁷ STJ's field researcher physically interviewed the witness on 9 May 2024.

⁶⁸ STJ's field researcher physically interviewed the witness on 12 May 2024.

⁶⁹ STJ's field researcher physically interviewed the witness on 2 July 2024.

⁷⁰ STJ's field researcher physically interviewed the witness on 2 June 2024.

Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and currently living in Qamishli/Qamishlo, reported that a military commander named Abu Mar’i and his battalion were cultivating his land in the village of Azou Danka, as a local in the area told him. According to open sources, Abu Mar’i is affiliated with the Sultan Murad Division.⁷¹ Shiyar explained,

“No one contacted me or sought my permission to cultivate my land. As far as I know, Abu Mar’i, a military commander, is responsible for the area extending from the village of Azou Danka southward to the villages of Sheikh Shibli, al-Mashrafa, and al-Duwaira.”

Four people who were displaced from villages in Tell Abyad/Girê Spî have reported that their lands are being invested by the same person; someone referred to him as Abu Abd al-Safrani. Qadri Daoud,⁷² a 50-year-old Kurdish farmer from the village of Al-Yabsa, currently residing in the Tell al-Samn camp in Raqqa, stated that his family's lands were irrigated and equipped with a well and a water-pumping engine that cost approximately \$10,000. Additionally, they had tractors and other agricultural machinery. Qadri added,

“Currently, the agricultural lands are controlled by individuals from Idlib and As-Safira cities who cultivate and benefit from them. A former farmer who worked with us before the displacement mentioned that they now work on our lands for someone named Abu Abdo.”

Qadri received information from his neighbors that most of the houses in the al-Yabisa village, including his own, were vandalized after the village was turned into a military crossing. He stated,

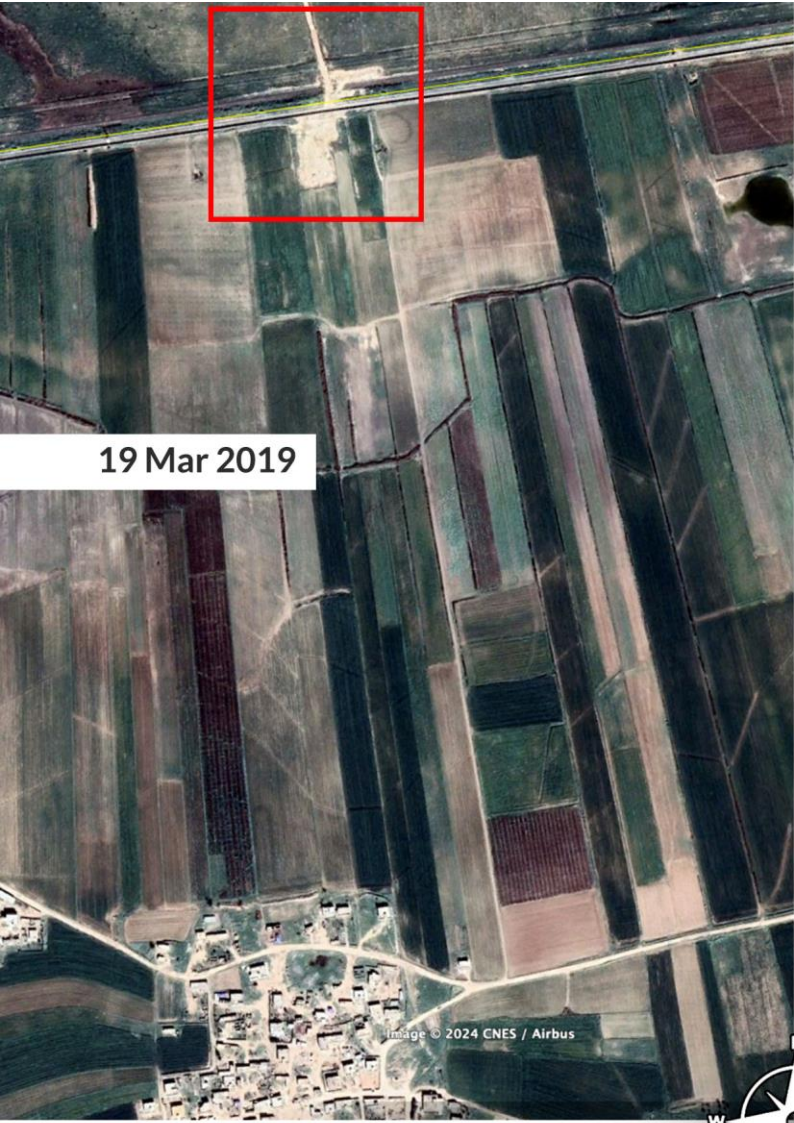
“All the military forces that entered northern Syria in 2019 entered through our village. They paved a road from the center of the village to the border post on the northern (Turkish) side and turned the village into a military point and a crossing for the movement of military forces.”

Image No 6: The satellite images below, collected by STJ, support the information provided by the previous witness on the allegations of opening a “military crossing” (the red square) next to Al-Yabsa village (the image taken on 11 November 2019). While the image taken on 13 March 2024 indicates the lack of human activity in the village, except for some roads, after the displacement of all its residents, which may be indicated by the expansion of green areas in the village as well.

⁷¹ A video showing the arrest of a Christian revolutionary activist and other individuals on charges prepared by Abu Marai, who works with Sultan Murad Division, Ras al-Ayn today Facebook page, 14 March 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/r.news.today/videos/816427185629978/>

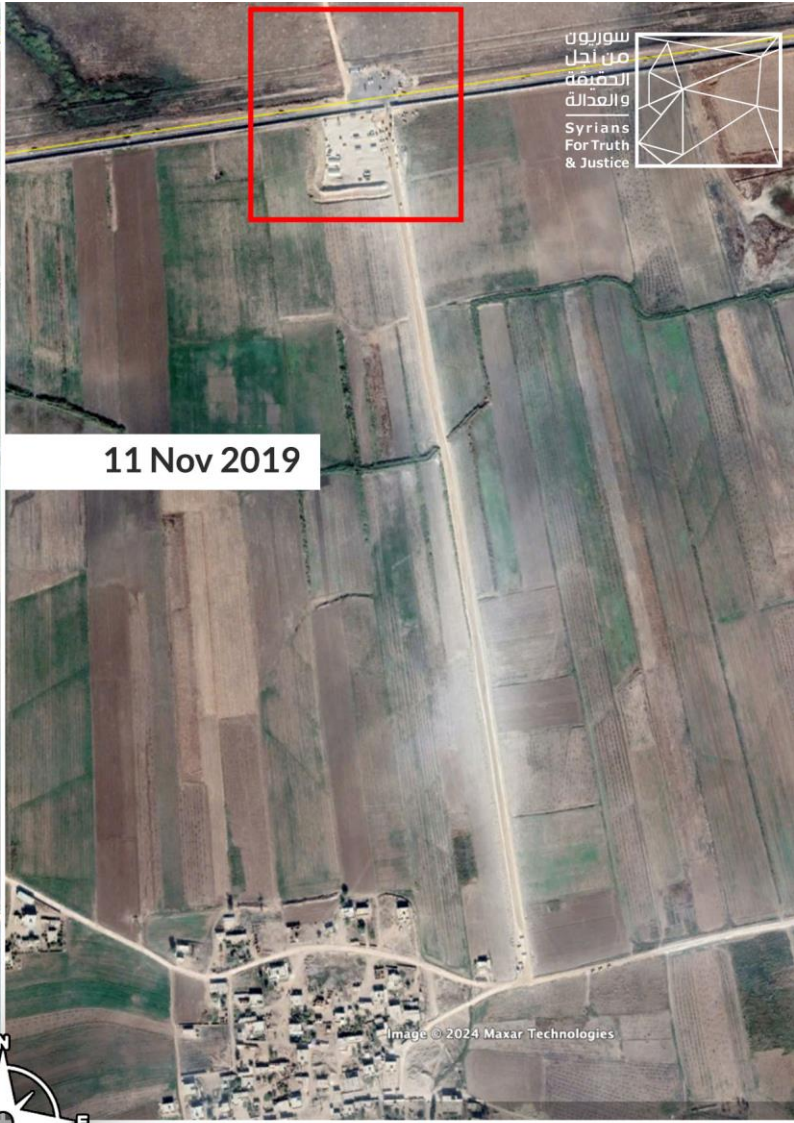
#Peace Spring # Ras al-Ayn #, peace and Allahs mercy and blessings be upon you, my brother, there is a matter of revenge related to the killing of the wife of brother Abu Akab al-Sakhni, the wife of brother Abu Akab al-Sakhni, al-Furat News Telegram account, 3 September 2020, https://t.me/Jarablous_alkabous_9/5094

⁷² STJ’s field researcher physically interviewed the witness on 29 June 2024.



19 Mar 2019

Image © 2024 CNES / Airbus



11 Nov 2019

Image © 2024 Maxar Technologies

سوريون
من أجل
الحقيقة
والعدالة
Syrians
For Truth
& Justice



19 Oct 2019

Image © 2024 CNES / Airbus



13 Mar 2024

Image © 2024 Airbus

Jan Mamo,⁷³ a 31-year-old displaced Kurdish farmer from the Susak village in Tell Abyad/Girê Spî, described his situation after his land was seized saying,

“I used to own 45 dunams of irrigated agricultural land and an additional 130 dunams that belonged to my uncles, which I cultivated and benefited from. I had all the necessary agricultural machinery at my house and was self-sufficient. However, now I am a tenant in Raqqa, working in agriculture for others and renting land to cultivate. The person currently cultivating my land is Abu Abdo; I am uncertain whether he is from As-Safira or Idlib.”

According to multiple open sources verified by STJ, the head of the Economic Office of the Glory Corps/Faylaq al-Majd,⁷⁴ known as Hajj Abdo al-Safrani, has taken control of about 5,000 dunams of agricultural land in the villages of Tell Ahmer, Susak, Yargwi, and Tell Akhdar, making him the most prominent farmer in the region. Most of this land belongs to displaced Kurds.⁷⁵

Jan mentioned that the entire village of Susak is controlled by the Glory Corps/Faylaq al-Majd, which was confirmed by the testimony of Walat Abdul Razzaq,⁷⁶ a 33-year-old displaced Kurdish farmer from the village. Walat stated,

“A person named Abu Abdo, the agriculture official in Tell Abyad/Girê Spî, is currently seizing their property and lands. The Glory Corps/Faylaq al-Majd has turned their homes into military points as they control the western front in Tell Abyad/Girê Spî. The faction has also altered the geography of their villages, merging their land with neighboring villages and benefiting from it while the villagers are displaced in Raqqa.”

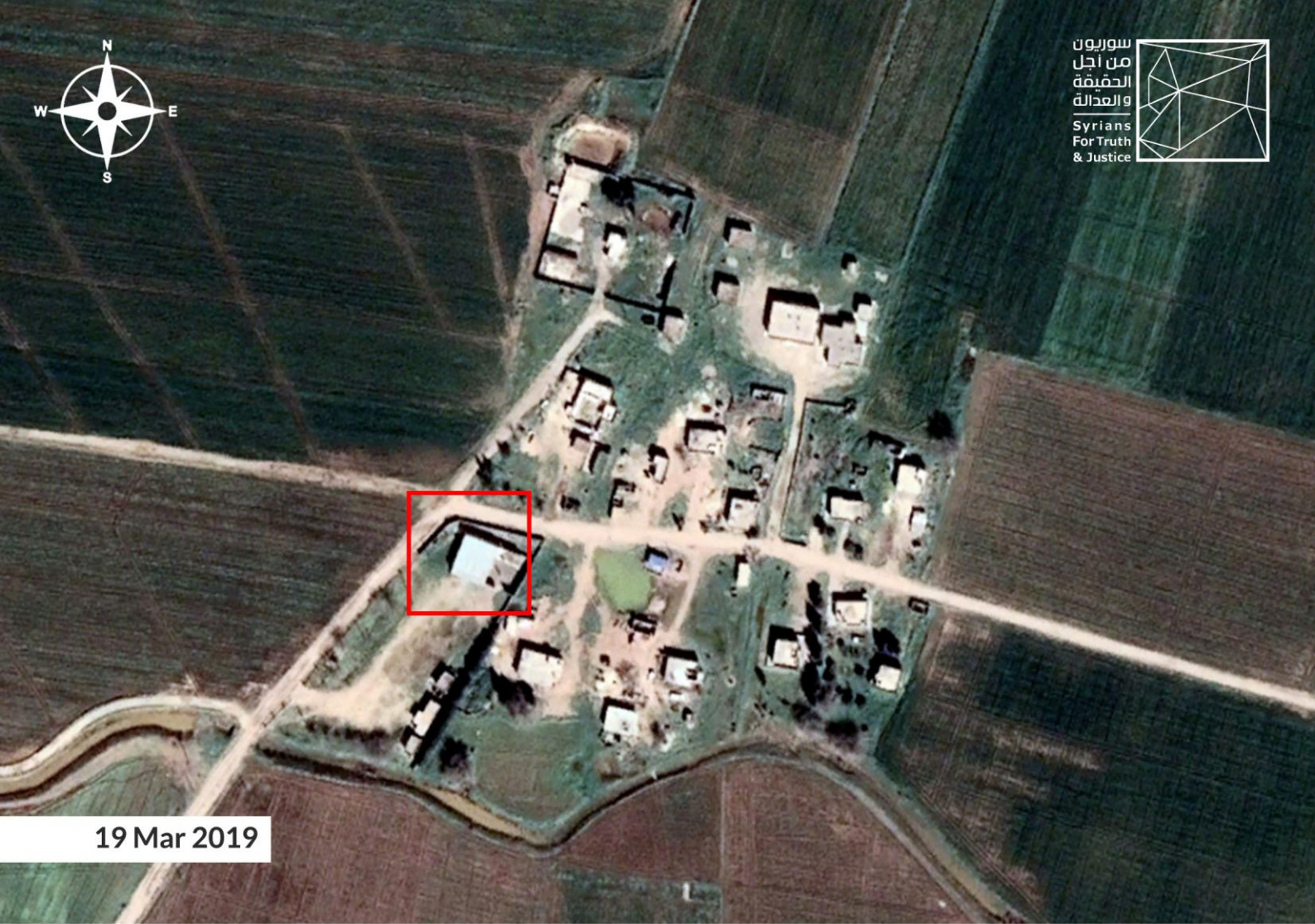
Image 7: These satellite images, collected by STJ, support the information provided by the previous witness regarding the allegations that the village of Susak is empty of its residents. The image taken on 18 May 2022 shows the disappearance of some places' roofs (indicated by the red square), while the image of 19 March 2019 shows them still present.

⁷³ STJ's field researcher physically interviewed the witness on 23 June 2024.

⁷⁴The Glory Corps/Faylaq al-Majd was founded in 2019, with Turkish support, and was led by Yasser Abdul Rahim and his deputy Yamen Taljo, both are naturalized Turkish. The Corps is part of the 3rd Corps of the SNA and participated in Operation Peace Spring alongside the Turkish army. Its elements are deployed in all areas controlled by Türkiye.

⁷⁵ “4 Years of Crimes in Occupied Girê Spî and Serê Kaniyê”, Hawar News Agency, 9 October 2023, <https://hawarnews.com/ar/169690326085259> (Last accessed: 6 September 2024).

⁷⁶ STJ's field researcher physically interviewed the witness on 29 June 2024.



19 Mar 2019



18 May 2022



سوريون
من أجل
الحقيقة
والعدالة
Syrians
For Truth
& Justice

Image © 2024 CNES / Airbus
Image © 2024 Airbus

Imagery Date: 7/31/2021 36°48'54.61" N 40°

Image 8: The above image – on page 25 – links a satellite image of the Turkish military base in the village of al-Dawudiya (GPS coordinates: 36.812806, 40.270028) and a live image (Image No. 1) of tanks and elements of the 1st Commando Battalion, under the command of the 49th Commando Brigade, according to an article [published by the Turkish Anadolu Agency](#)—credit of Image No. 1: [Video published on the X account of the Turkish Ministry of Defense](#).

It is important to note that the military operation, carried out by the Turkish forces and the SNA factions, extended beyond the villages of al-Yabisa and Susak. It also resulted in the villages of Sherkrak in Tell Abyad/Girê Spî,⁷⁷ and Bab al-Faraj and al-Dawudiya in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê coming under Turkish military control.⁷⁸

6. Dangers of Return Amid the Lack of Remedies or Accountability

“They told my father: ‘We will kill you and bury you here if you return.’”

Quote from Lund Mahmoud, a Kurdish IDP from Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê, speaking about the dangers of returning to the city.

Seven of the witnesses we interviewed returned to Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê, and one to Tell Abyad/Girê Spî shortly after being displaced. They did so to check on their property, try to reclaim it, or stay in the cities. Two of them were arrested. Some interviewees mentioned the return of their relatives and reported experiencing financial extortion, arrests for ransoms, beatings, and threats of arrest or death. These actions were allegedly due to their affiliation with the Kurdish forces or administration that previously controlled the area. As documented in previous reports by STJ, displaced women faced harassment when trying to recover their property upon returning to Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê.⁷⁹

Shadi Aqil,⁸⁰ a 42-year-old Kurdish daily wage worker, returned to his village of Jakla in Tell Abyad/Girê Spî to bring some supplies from his home. He was arrested along with his two brothers and his cousin after members of the Abu Douma 113 Battalion, affiliated with the SNA, surrounded the house. Shadi recounted,

⁷⁷ “Housing, Land, and Property Rights Violations in Ras al-Ayn-Serê Kaniyê and Tal Abyad after 2019”, PÊL-Civil Waves, 25 January 2024, <https://pel-cw.org/en/16584/> (Last accessed: 6 September 2024).

⁷⁸ “Sere Kaniye and Tel Abyad: 4 years of rights violations”, North Press Agency, 11 October 2023, <https://npasyria.com/en/106072/> (Last accessed: 6 September 2024);

See also: “Where is My Home: Property Rights Violations in Northern Syria Perpetuate Demographic Change”, the Synergy/Hevdestî Association for Victims, 25 January 2023, <https://hevdesti.org/en/violations-of-property-rights-in-northern-syria/> (Last accessed: 8 September 2024);

Report of COI-Syria (A/HRC/45/31), 15 September 2020, para. 51.

⁷⁹ “Syria: ‘Get out of Here before You See Things You Would Not Like, and Never Return!’”, STJ, 8 October 2022, <https://stj-sy.org/en/syria-get-out-of-here-before-you-see-things-you-would-not-like-and-never-return/> (Last accessed: 30 August 2024).

⁸⁰ STJ’s field researcher physically interviewed the witness on 31 May 2024.

“They arrested us, blindfolded us, handcuffed us, and took us to their headquarters. We were detained for 28 days. They accused us of being members of the PKK. I was also accused of working for the Kurdish forces’ intelligence (Rojava Intelligence). We were tortured several times during the interrogation using a tool called a blanko.”⁸¹

Shadi mentioned that the faction released them after receiving a ransom of \$3,000 each following mediation. Shadi currently resides in a rented house in Raqqa. He mentioned that an individual connected to one of the SNA factions that he could not identify now resides in his house.

Only two displaced persons dared to contact local authorities to reclaim their belongings amid the lawlessness Nader Salama described in another segment of his testimony, saying,

“Chaos reigned in the city, and no one could file a complaint or report against any member of the armed factions. Each member claimed to be in charge of controlling the city, and no one could hold them accountable.”

Nader fled the city, unable to reclaim his shop or his home. He feared being kidnapped or arrested after a member of an SNA faction identified him and informed him that his son was wanted for performing mandatory military service with the AANES. The faction considered anyone working for the AANES, whether in a military or civilian role, to be wanted.

Ramzi Suleiman,⁸² a 46-year-old Kurdish sanitary ware trader living in Qamishli/Qamishlo, returned to Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê on 9 November 2019, hoping to remove goods from his shop. Unfortunately, he discovered that they had been stolen by the Turkish army through a hole in the back wall of the shop. His neighbor witnessed Turkish soldiers taking the goods from his shop and others in the area. Ramzi attempted to protect the remaining contents of his shop by closing the hole, only to find it reopened the next morning. This led him to seek help from the authorities. Ramzi detailed,

“I went to the military council and registered everything with them. I documented that I was the owner of the property and a resident of the city. They made photocopies of all the evidence I had, hoping that I would be able to stay in the city, but unfortunately, it did not work out. I went back to the military council again, asking to take the rest of my belongings out of the city, but they insisted that I could only go to the surrounding villages like Tell Halaf. Since there were no cars or people to help me, I ended up returning on the fourth day without being able to do anything.”

Unlike Ramzi and Nader, Renas Ayo, 49,⁸³ was unable to avoid arrest when he returned to Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê around 20 November 2019. He went back to check on his home and shop

⁸¹ The detainee is suspended from his wrists to a rope on a track connected to a pulley (planco), then beaten and left to swing.

⁸² STJ’s field researcher physically interviewed the witness on 28 June 2024.

⁸³ STJ’s field researcher physically interviewed the witness on 9 May 2024.

in the al-Sina’ neighborhood, which was then controlled by the Mu’tasim Billah Division.⁸⁴ Renas recounted,

“There, one of the officials told me that if I wanted to keep my shop, I needed to provide proof of ownership. I showed him the lease contract, but he insisted I needed a document from the city court to move or transfer my belongings from the shop. When I went to the court, they told me I needed a paper from the military police. The military police then directed me to the local council. The next morning, heading to the local council to obtain the necessary paper to retrieve my industrial equipment, I heard a voice calling, ‘Arrest him, this is the journalist’s brother, arrest him.’ I turned to him, and it was Abu Ammar al-Hosho, a leader in the al-Mu’tasim Battalion. I was blindfolded and taken to an unknown location, where I was held captive for two months and ten days until I was released in exchange for a ransom of \$10,000.”

Renas was questioned about his and his brother’s relationship with the SDF during the investigation. He was tortured by four or five members of the Mu’tasim Billah Division, who took turns beating him until he lost consciousness. Later, the same members forced him, at gunpoint, to call his wife to ask her to secure a ransom. Renas currently lives in the city of Qamishli/Qamishlo in a rented house, while his home was taken over at least a year and a half ago by a member of the al-Mawali Battalion, which is linked to the al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division. In a previous report, STJ documented extensive looting and robbery operations that targeted shops, workshops, and warehouses in the [Industrial Area](#) of Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê, in which the Mu’tasim Billah and Sultan Murad Divisions were primarily involved.⁸⁵

Jamil Othman,⁸⁶ a 44-year-old Kurdish beekeeper living in Germany, confirmed that approximately three months after being displaced from Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê, he returned and was blackmailed by members of the Ahrar al-Sharqiya faction. On this, he detailed,

“I had to ask for permission before entering my home, but they did not allow me to enter and threatened me, saying, ‘You are with the [PKK] party and the Kurds are all with the [PKK] party.’ After many attempts, they asked me for 200,000 SP. I paid and was allowed to enter my home. The home was completely robbed, including the door locks and the equipment for the apiaries.”

Lund Mahmoud,⁸⁷ a 38-year-old Kurdish car mechanic displaced from Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and currently resides in al-Hasakah, mentioned that his father was threatened when he returned to the city to check on his sons’ homes. He noted that his home was under the control of the Ahrar al-Sharqiya faction and added,

⁸⁴ The Division was founded in December 2015 and is part of the 2nd Corps of the SNA. It is deployed in areas in the northern Aleppo countryside, particularly in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê, and its headquarters is located in the city of Marea. The Division participated in all Turkish military operations in Syria.

⁸⁵ “Syria: Sultan Murad and Mu’tasim Divisions Pillage the Industrial Zone in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê”, STJ, a joint report, STJ, PÊL- Civil Waves, the Synergy/Hevdestî Association for Victims, 6 October 2021, <https://stj-sy.org/en/syria-sultan-murad-and-mutasim-divisions-pillage-the-industrial-zone-in-ras-al-ayn-sere-kaniye/> (Last accessed: 7 September 2024).

⁸⁶ STJ’s field researcher physically interviewed the witness on 3 June 2024.

⁸⁷ STJ’s field researcher physically interviewed the witness on 11 May 2024.

“When my father arrived to check on my home, members [of Ahrar al-Sharqiya intercept him] insulted him using offensive words. They said, “You Kurds only comply by military boots (military violence). You fled like rats and now came to demand your homes. If you do not leave, we will tie you to a car and throw you out of the city.’ They did not allow him to enter the house or take anything from inside, and they also threatened him with weapons. My father said, ‘They wore military uniforms and had the Turkish flag on their arms.’ He waited until the next day to try again but to no avail. They told him: ‘If you come back again, we will kill you and bury you here.’”

It is important to note that even after 2019, local authorities remained ineffective in returning properties to their original owners. Very few property restitution cases were documented, and property rights violations by controlling factions or associated civilians continued without consequences. This included violations such as arrest, detention, torture, and financial extortion in exchange for the release of detainees or allowing them to access their property, as documented in reports by the COI-Syria.⁸⁸ In its 2022 report, the COI-Syria stated that IDPs from the area expressed a general reluctance, due to fear of arrest and detention, to claim their properties back. They had been threatened with arrests or otherwise forced to withdraw complaints submitted to various informal local grievances committees regarding extortion, property appropriation, and the imposition of levies. This was due to the risk of reprisals by SNA factions’ members against whom complaints were submitted, as those factions were themselves involved in the complaint and restitution process.⁸⁹ In December 2020, factions within the 2nd Corps of the SNA announced the formation of a grievance redress committee,⁹⁰ which they later dissolved because residents were reluctant to engage with it⁹¹.

⁸⁸ Report of COI-Syria ([A/HRC/45/31](#)), 15 September 2020, paras. 49-52.

⁸⁹ Report of COI-Syria ([A/HRC/51/45](#)), 14 September 2022, para. 76.

⁹⁰ The 2nd Corps of the SNA consists of several factions, the most important of which are the Sultan Murad Division, the al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division, Mu’tasim Billah Division, the Northern Hawks Brigade, the Army of Islam/Jaysh al-Islam, and the al-Rahman Legion/Faylaq al-Rahman.

⁹¹ “The National Army Forms Rights Restoration Committee in Ras Al-Ayn, Syria, After Increasing Violations in Peace Spring Area”, al-Quds al-Arabi, 21 December 2020, <https://www.alquds.co.uk/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D8%B7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%B4%D9%83%D9%84-%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%86%D8%A9-%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%82%D9%88%D9%82-%D9%81/> (Last accessed: 30 August 2024).



Image 9: Civilians fleeing Türkiye’s Operation Peace Spring in October 2019. Credit: STJ.

7. IDPs' Current Situation

“Day after day, I lose my children too,”

Quote from Safi Kanjo, a Kurdish IDP from Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê, as he spoke about the impact of displacement on his life and his family’s.

A significant number of IDPs from the two addressed cities are living in four camps that do not offer adequate living conditions. These camps are Serê Kaniyê/al-Tala'i, Washokani/Tuwaina in al-Hasakah, Newroz in the outskirts of al-Malikiyah/Derik city, and Tell al-Samn in Raqqa. Additionally, there are substantial numbers of IDPs in northeastern Syria, particularly in Raqqa, al-Hasakah, and Qamishli/Qamishlo. Moreover, thousands have sought refuge in Iraqi Kurdistan and European countries.⁹²

The impact of displacement is similar for those fleeing violence, whether they live in camps or outside of them. Most interviewees, including three living in the Tell al-Samn camp and others renting homes in different areas of Raqqa and al-Hasakah, mentioned that displacement has worsened their financial situation. Kawa Abdul Hamid,⁹³ a 52-year-old Kurdish teacher displaced from Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and now living in Qamishli/Qamishlo, expressed,

“Displacement has had a huge impact on our lives; we can say that it has brought us back to square one.”

Kawa supports his family by giving private lessons as members of the Sultan Murad Division continue to occupy his house, citing his affiliation to the PKK, as an Arab neighbor who remained in the area told him.

Only a few IDPs, like Kawa, have returned to their previous jobs in the host communities, while others have found new job opportunities in different fields. However, some have lost their financial independence and now rely on their sons or relatives in Kurdistan or European countries to cover the high living and housing costs. House rents range between \$75 and \$100. Shadi Aqil, who used to work as a farmer in the city of Tell Abyad/Girê Spî before being displaced, shared what he experienced, saying,

“My Entire Life Savings Vanished Overnight. Now, I work as a laborer for a daily wage to support my family. I live in a house that I rent for \$70, and I cannot provide everything my family needs.”

On this regard, Hamed Jamil said in another part of his testimony,

“Ever since we left Tell Abyad/Girê Spî, I have gone from owning an electrical appliance store to being displaced in Tell al-Samn camp. I now live in a tent no larger than 10 square meters, and we have to wait until the end of the month to receive food baskets from organizations. Rents in the cities are expensive, so we are forced to stay in the camp.”

Even due to their poor financial situation, some people could not send their children to school and had to send them to work instead. One of them was Safi Kanjo,⁹⁴ a 43-year-old Kurdish man displaced from Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê. He used to work as a sales representative for

⁹² “Syria: Role of International Agreements in Forced Displacement (3)”, STJ, 19 October 2023, <https://stj-sy.org/en/syria-role-of-international-agreements-in-forced-displacement-3/> (Last accessed: 27 August 2024).

⁹³ STJ’s field researcher physically interviewed the witness on 27 June 2024.

⁹⁴ STJ’s field researcher physically interviewed the witness on 25 June 2024.

pharmaceutical companies and managed to buy land where he hoped to build a house. Safi recounted,

“The occupation has prevented me and my family from achieving our dream of owning a private home and ending our reliance on rental houses. In Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê city, I used to send my children to school. However, our circumstances have become very difficult here in al-Hasakah. We now live in a rented house, pay for our water and electricity, and I can no longer afford to send my children to school. I feel like I have not just lost the city; day after day, I lose my children.”

Yasser Abdul Aziz,⁹⁵ a 53-year-old Kurdish man from Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê, shares Safi the same suffering. He owned his bakery before he was displaced from the city with his family. He lamented,

“I lost my house, my bakery, and my farm. I no longer own anything. I now live in the al-Malikiyah/Derik in a rented house that costs about \$100. I work in a bakery as a partner of a friend. My four children, who have left school to work with me, also work in the bakery. I know that I am committing a crime against my children by depriving them of education, but life is tough.”

The IDPs living in camps are facing numerous challenges, such as limited access to drinking water,⁹⁶ inadequate healthcare, and lack of support from local and international organizations. Residents of Washokani/Tuwaina camp in rural al-Hasakah are expressing concerns about the worn-out tents and the camp authorities' failure to replace them regularly, leaving them at risk of collapsing at any moment.⁹⁷ Washokani/Tuwaina camp is currently home to 16,730 people (2,361 families), while Serê Kaniyê/al-Tala'i camp houses 15,583 people (2,576 families), Tell al-Samn camp has 6,866 people (1,282 families), and Newroz camp accommodates 5,366 people (1,020 families).⁹⁸

8. Annexes

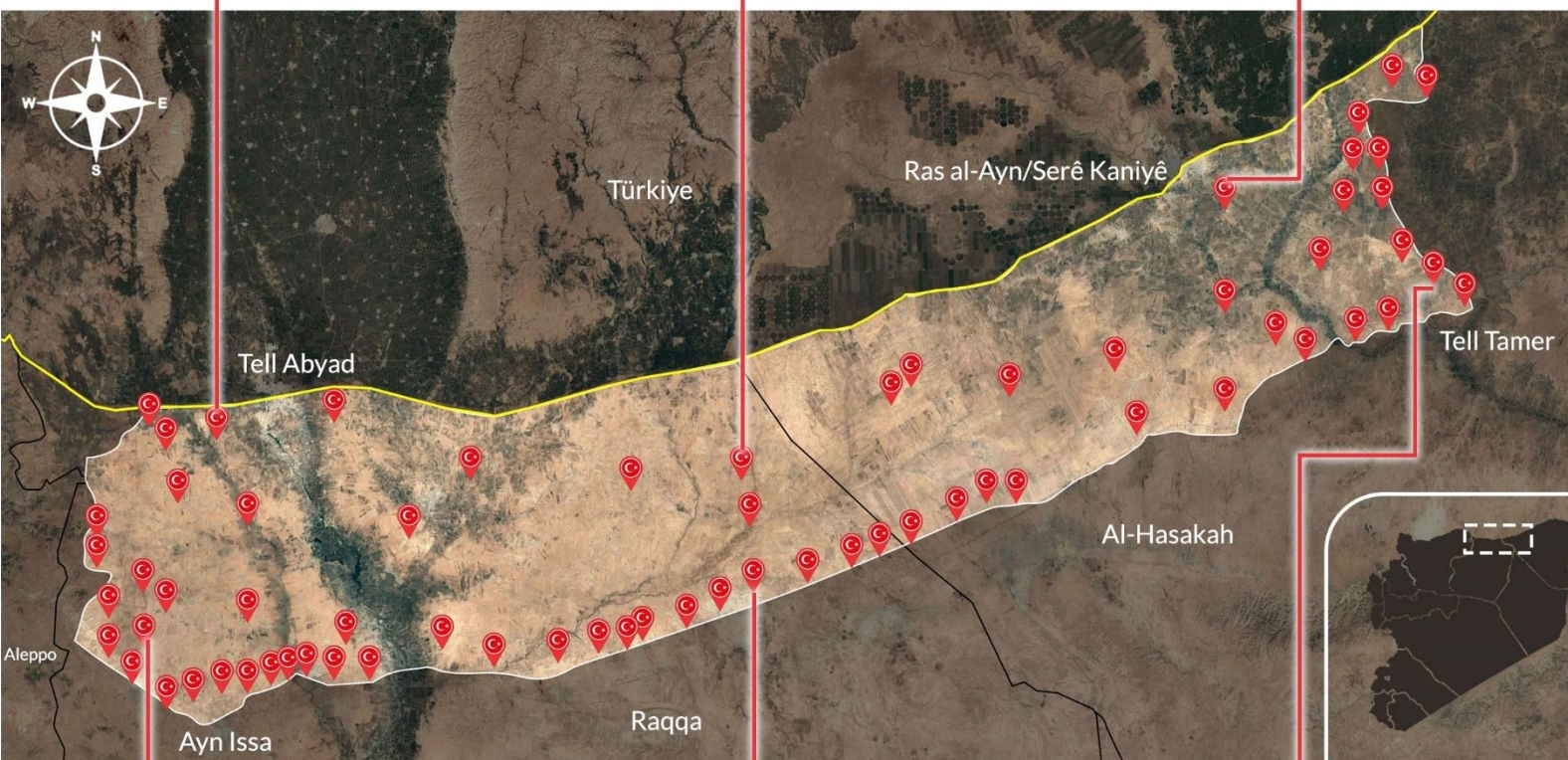
Satellite images (10 – 11 – 12 - 13 - 14) on pages 33, 34, 35, 36, and 37 display Turkish military bases, as well as police and gendarmerie positions, inside Syrian territory. These installations were set up after Operation Peace Spring in October 2019. STJ identified all locations.

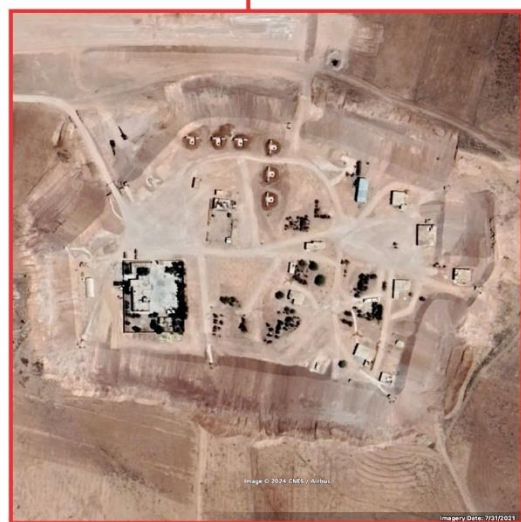
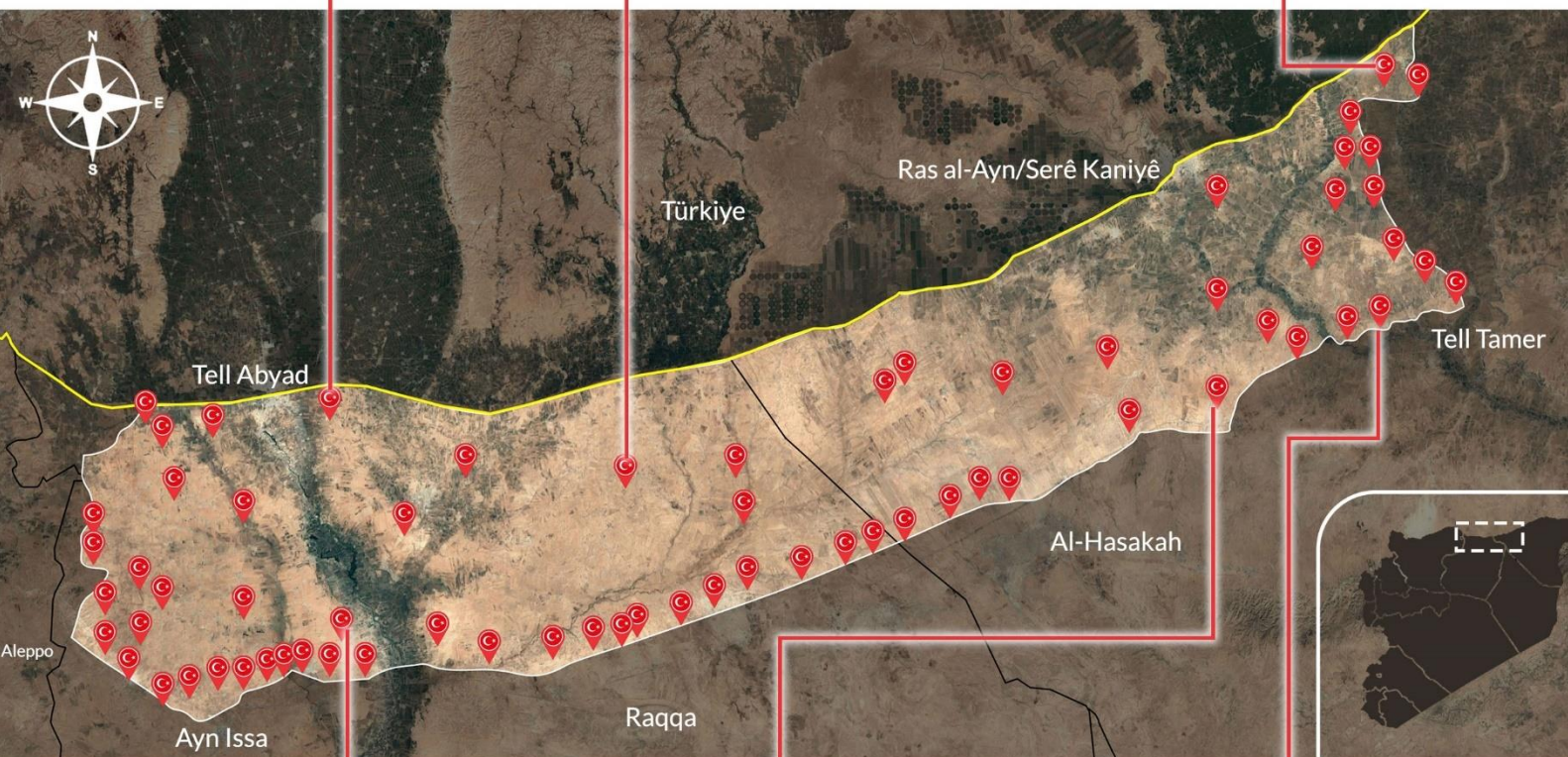
⁹⁵ STJ's field researcher physically interviewed the witness on 27 June 2024.

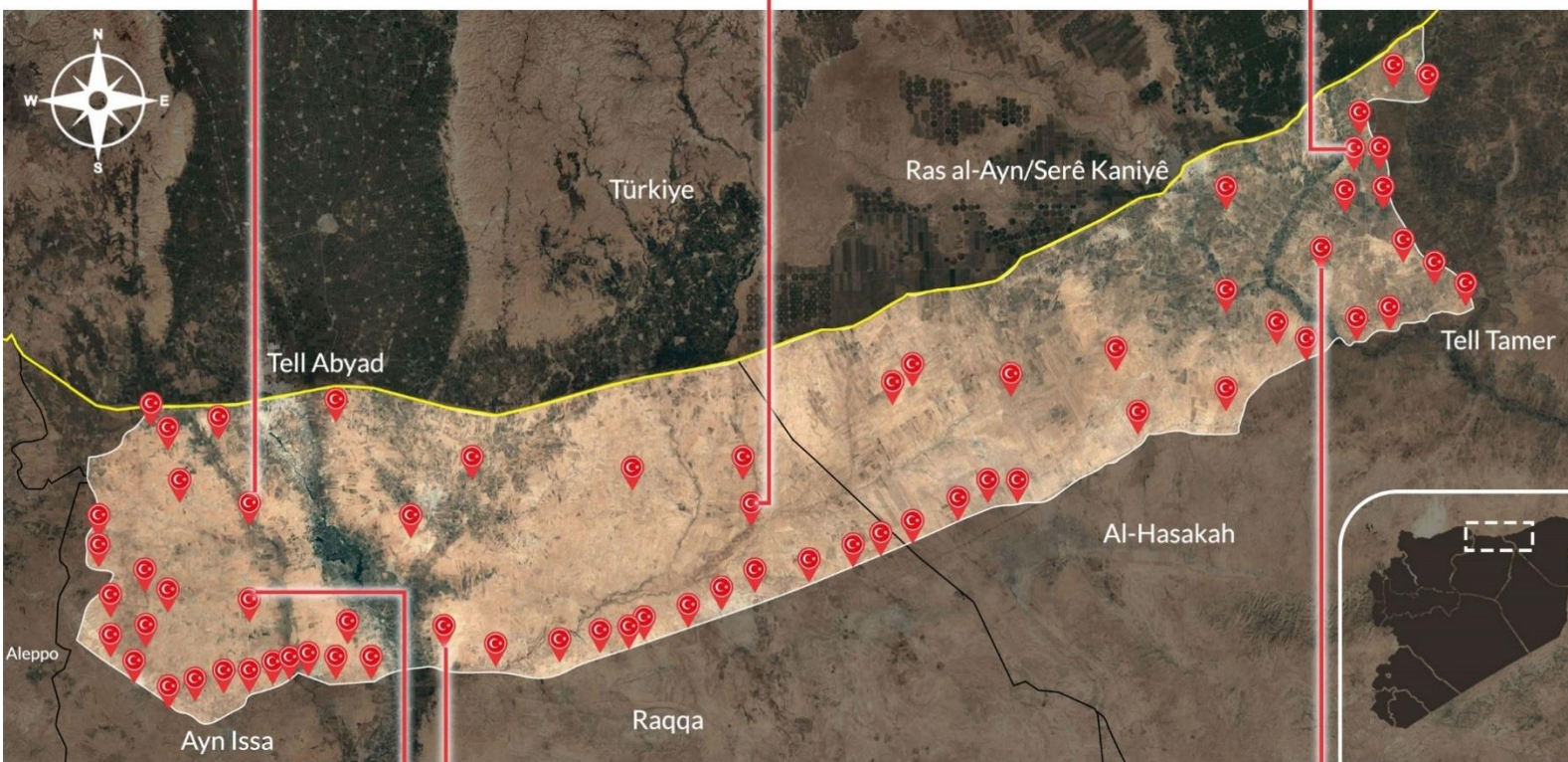
⁹⁶ “Allegation Letter Addressed to United Nations Special Procedures Regarding the Water Crisis in Northeast Syria”, STJ, 14 July 2023, <https://stj-sy.org/en/allegation-letter-addressed-to-united-nations-special-procedures-regarding-the-water-crisis-in-northeast-syria/> (Last accessed: 29 August 2024).

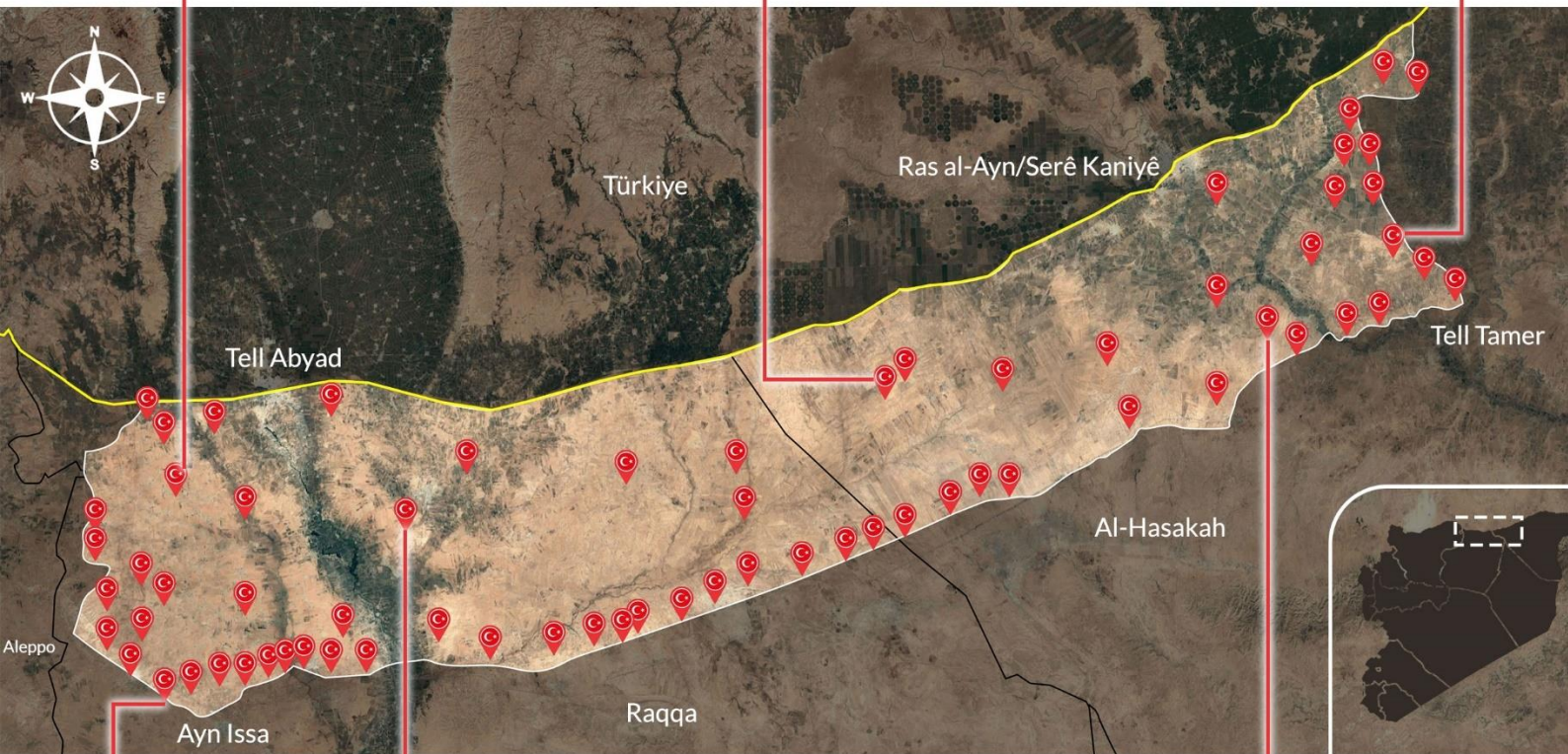
⁹⁷ “Washokani Camp in al-Hasakah Countryside.. Dilapidated Tents that have not been Replaced for Five Years”, North Press Agency, 13 August 2024, <https://npasyria.com/191141/> (Last accessed: 29 August 2024).

⁹⁸ According to statistics from STJ and correspondence with the Synergy/Hevdestî Association for Victims in September 2024.









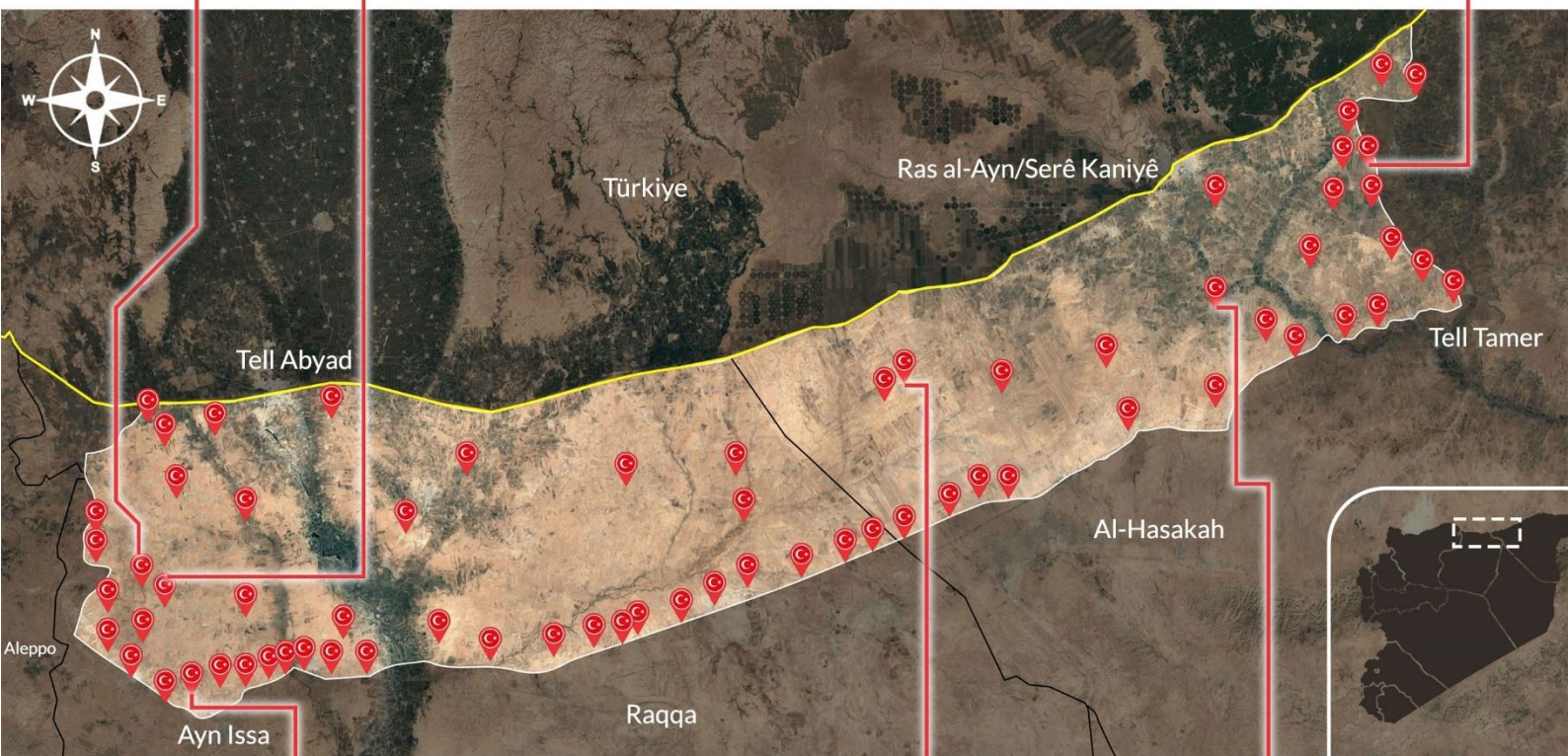


Image 15: Taken in one of the villages near the military training center of the Turkish 11th Commando Brigade in Tell Abyad/Girê Spî (GPS coordinates: [36.466444](#), [38.992611](#)) according to an article [published](#) by Anadolu Agency. Credit: [Video published by TRT Haber](#).



Image16: A military training center led by the Turkish 11th Commando Brigade in Tell Abyad (GPS coordinates: [36.466444](#), [38.992611](#)), as [reported](#) by Anadolu Agency. Credit of Images 1, 2, and 3 is a [video published by TRT Haber](#).

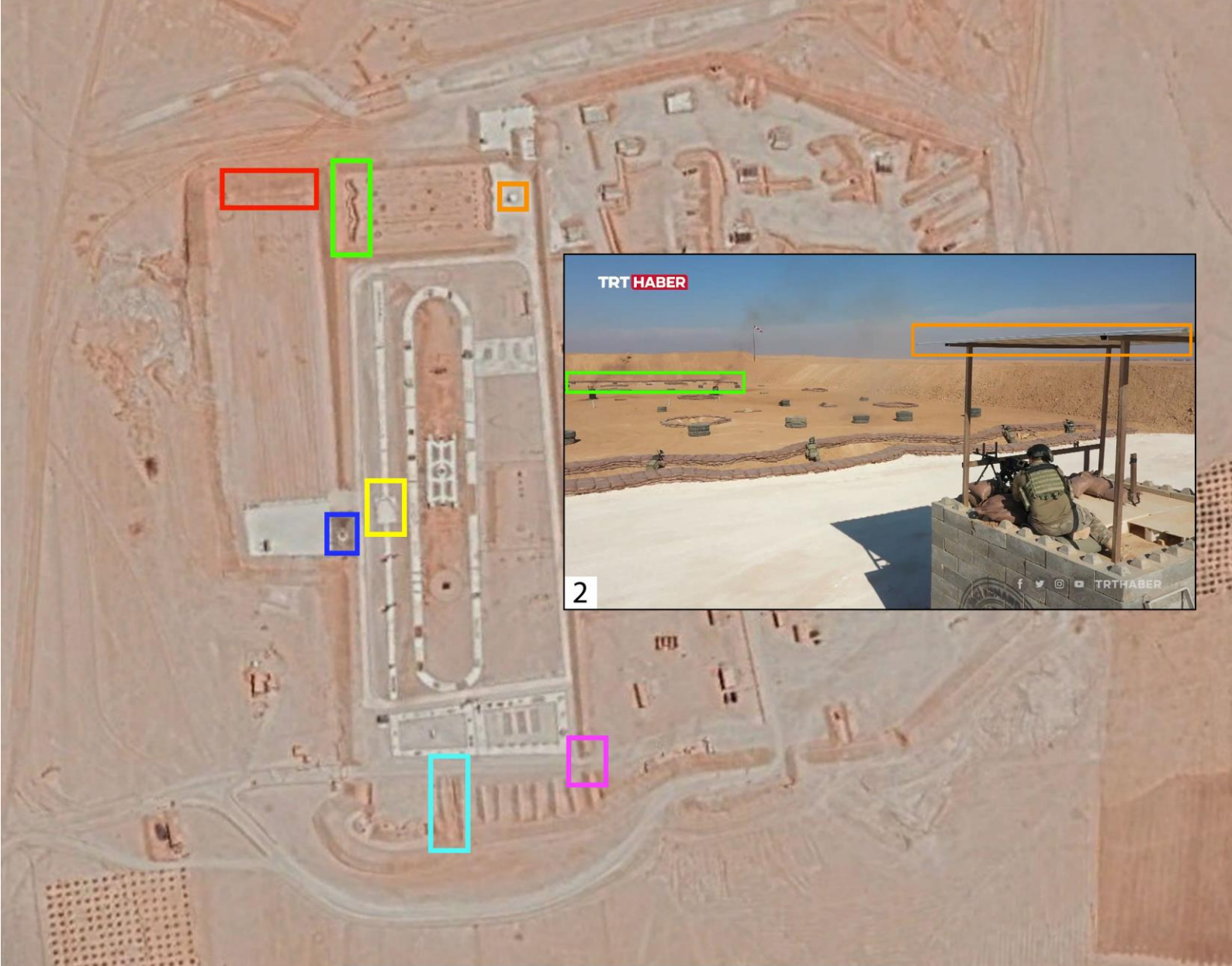
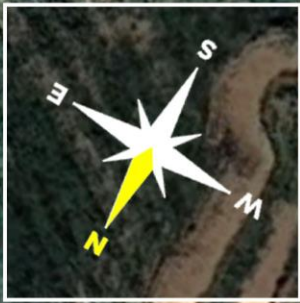


Image 17: A Turkish checkpoint south of Tell Abyad/Girê Spî (GPS coordinates: [36.590840, 38.930875](#)). The checkpoint is under the command of the 11th Commando Brigade as [reported](#) by Anadolu Agency. In the image, you can see a watchtower (Photo No. 1, Credit: [video in an article by Anadolu Agency](#)) and a monument dedicated to the martyrs of Operation Peace Spring (Photo No. 2, Credit: [Google Maps](#)).



Images 18 and 19: A visit by Hasan Şıldak, the current governor of Türkiye’s Şanlıurfa province, to the Main Command Center in the village of al-Mushayrifa in Tell Abyad/Girê Spî (GPS coordinates: [36.804737](#), [40.106711](#)), on 21 November 2023. This is where the Turkish 49th Commando Brigade is stationed. Credit: [The Şanlıurfa province website](#).

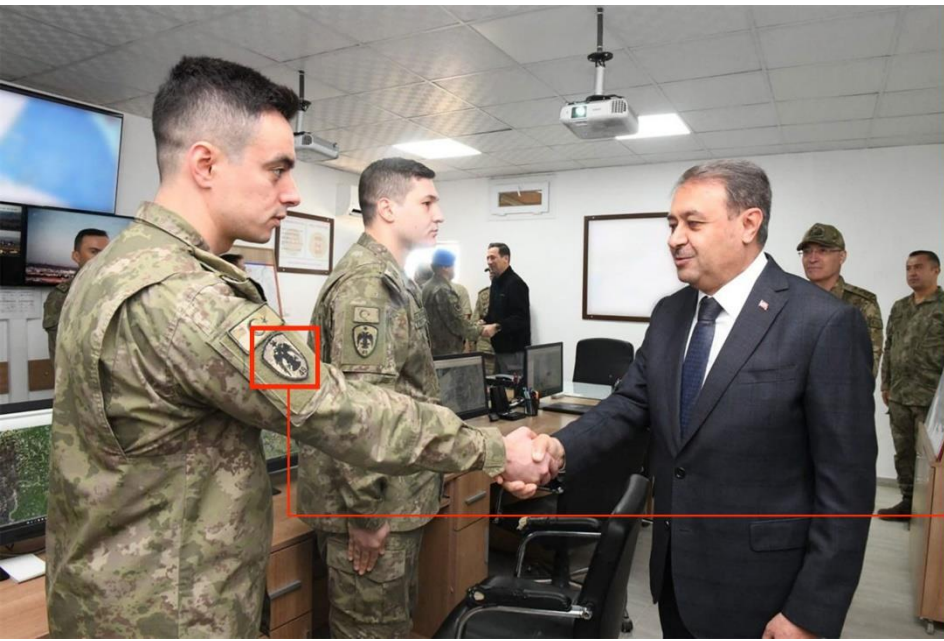


Image 20: A visit of Turkish General Arif Çetin, Commander-in-Chief of the Turkish Gendarmerie Forces, to the Joint Command Headquarters in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê (GPS coordinates: [36.841505, 40.062809](#)), on 31 October 2020. This location is where the Turkish Gendarmerie Forces are stationed. Credit: [The Şanlıurfa province website](#).



Image 21: A satellite image of the Joint Command Headquarters in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê (GPS coordinates: [36.841505, 40.062809](#)), where the Turkish Gendarmerie forces are stationed. This image is linked with Image No. 1, which shows the visit of Salih Ayhan, the former governor of Şanlıurfa Province, to the headquarters on 28 September 2022. (Credit of Image No. 1: [Şanlıurfa Province account on Platform X](#)).

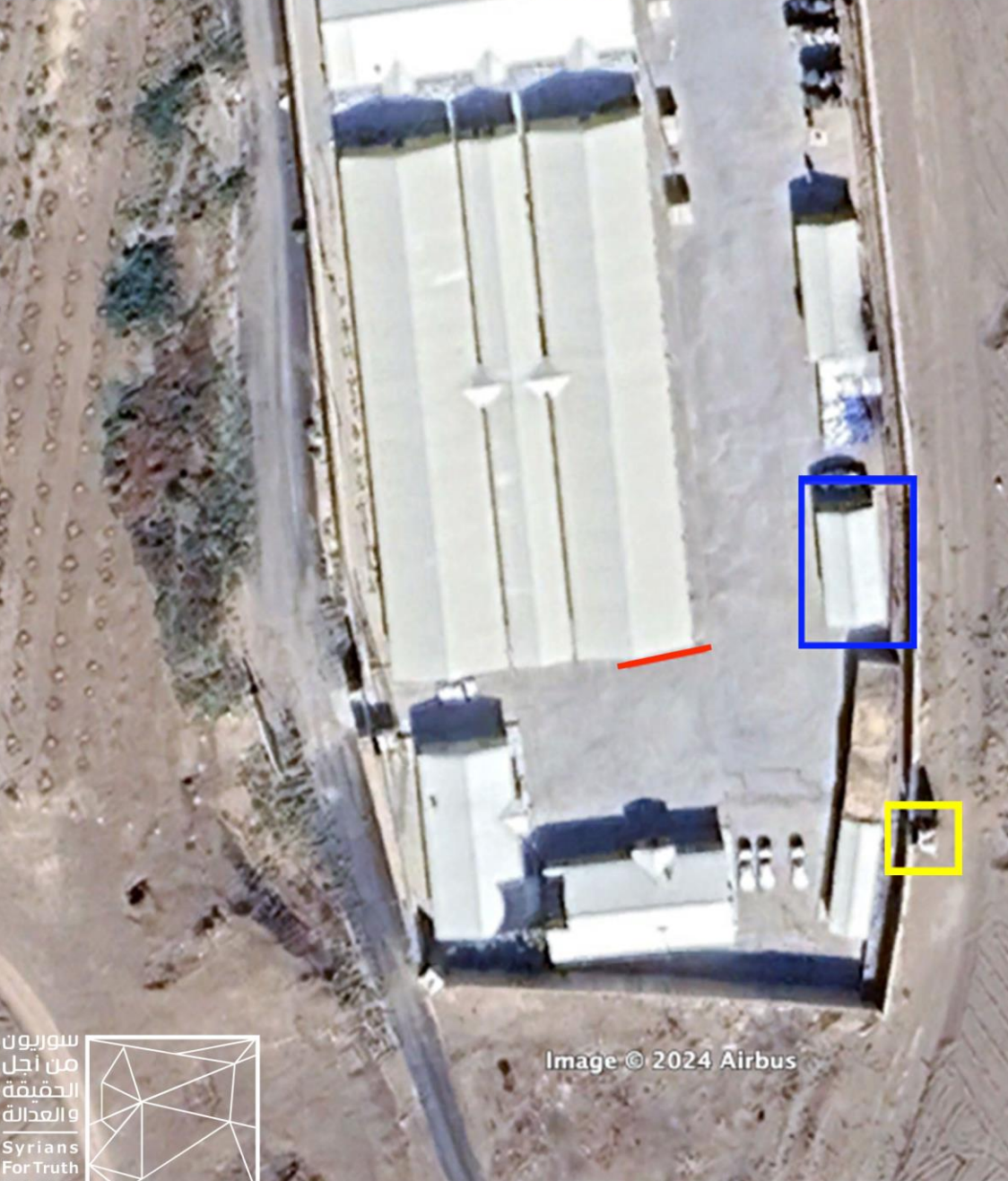
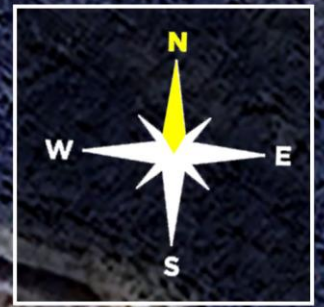


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سوريون
من أجل
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والعدالة
Syrians
For Truth
& Justice



Imagery D

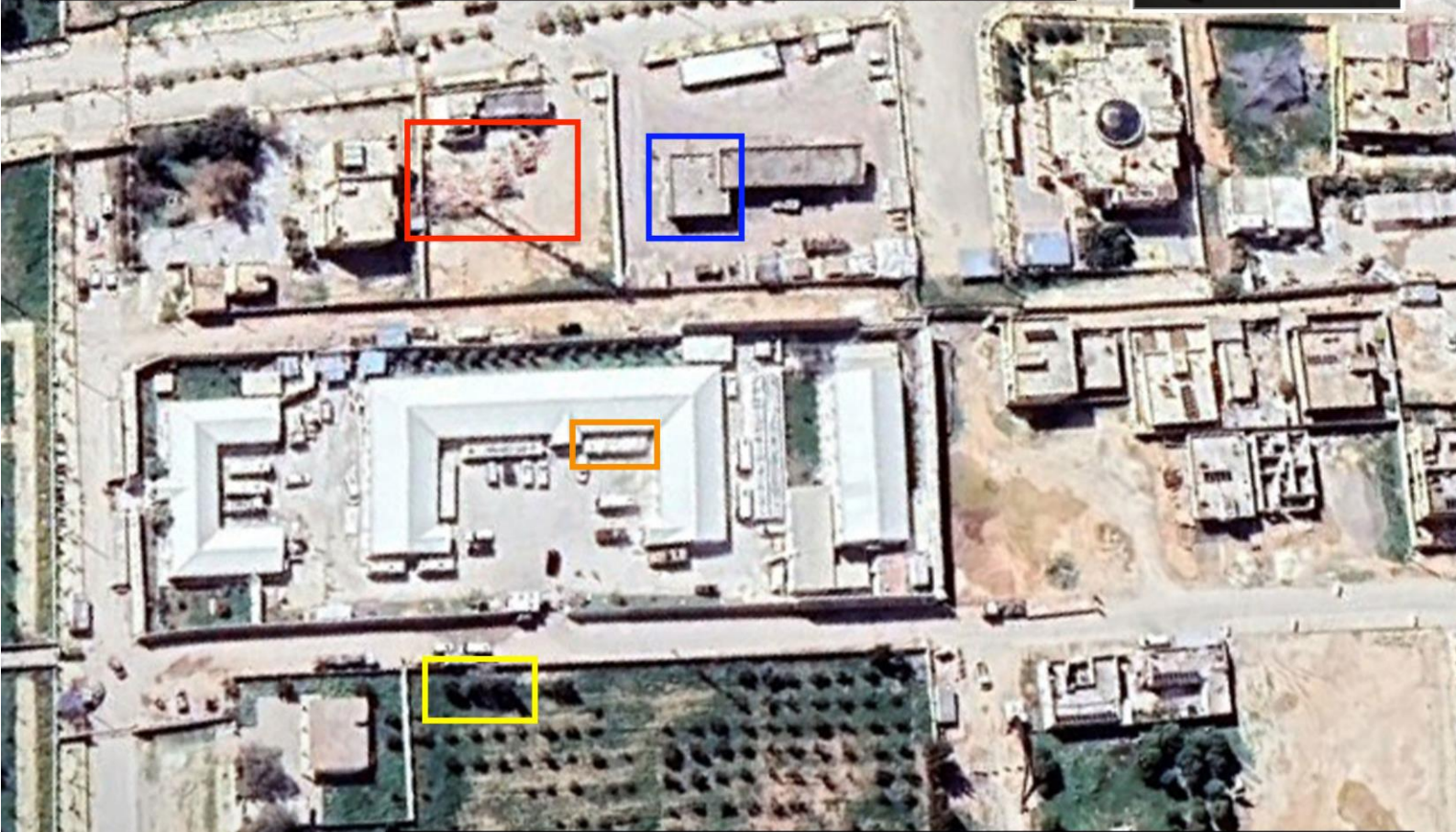
Image 22: This current governor of Şanlıurfa, Hasan Şıldak, during his visit to the Security Directorate in the city of Tell Abyad/Girê Spî (GPS coordinates: [36.686453, 38.943343](#)). The Turkish Special Police Forces, identifiable by their logo on the left of the image, are stationed there. The visit took place on 23 March 2024. (Credit: [Şanlıurfa province account on the X platform](#)).



Image 23: A satellite image of the Security Directorate in the city of Tell Abyad/Girê Spî (GPS coordinates: [36.686453, 38.943343](#)). It is linked with image No.1 of the directorate, sourced from a [video published on the account of the Turkish Minister of Interior, Süleyman Soylu, on the X platform](#), and image No. 2 of a visit by the current governor of Şanlıurfa, Hasan Şıldak, to the directorate, sourced from [Hasan Şıldak's account on the X platform](#). The date of the visit is 31 December 2023.



1 Emniyet Binası



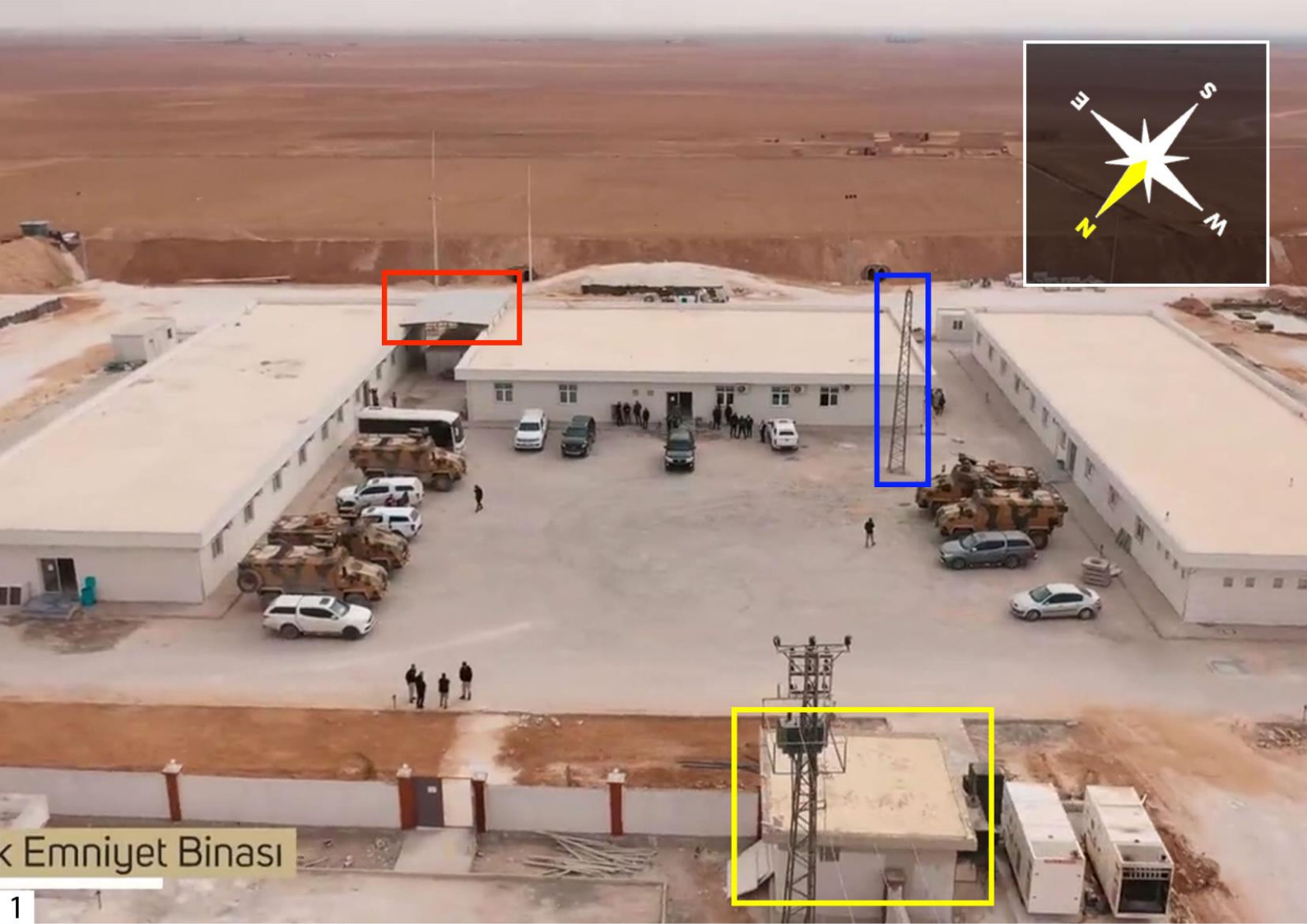
2



Image 24: The current governor of Şanlıurfa, Hasan Şildak, during his visit to the Tell Abyad/Girê Spî Security Directorate in Suluk, the headquarters of the Martyr Rasul Baruçu (GPS coordinates: [36.564754, 39.096037](#)), where the Turkish Special Police Forces are stationed, on 29 August 2024. (Credit: [Şanlıurfa province account on the X platform](#)).



Image 25: The image links a satellite image of the Tell Abyad/Girê Spî Security Directorate in Suluk, which is the headquarters of the Martyr Rasul Baruçu (GPS coordinates: [36.564754, 39.096037](#)), with an image of the directorate. Credit of image No. 1 is [a video published on the account of the Turkish Minister of Interior, Süleyman Soylu, on the X platform](#).



Emniyet Binası

1

5/2022



Image © 2024 CNES / Airbus

Imagery Date: 5/26/2022 36°33'54.18" N 39°05'44.84" E ele

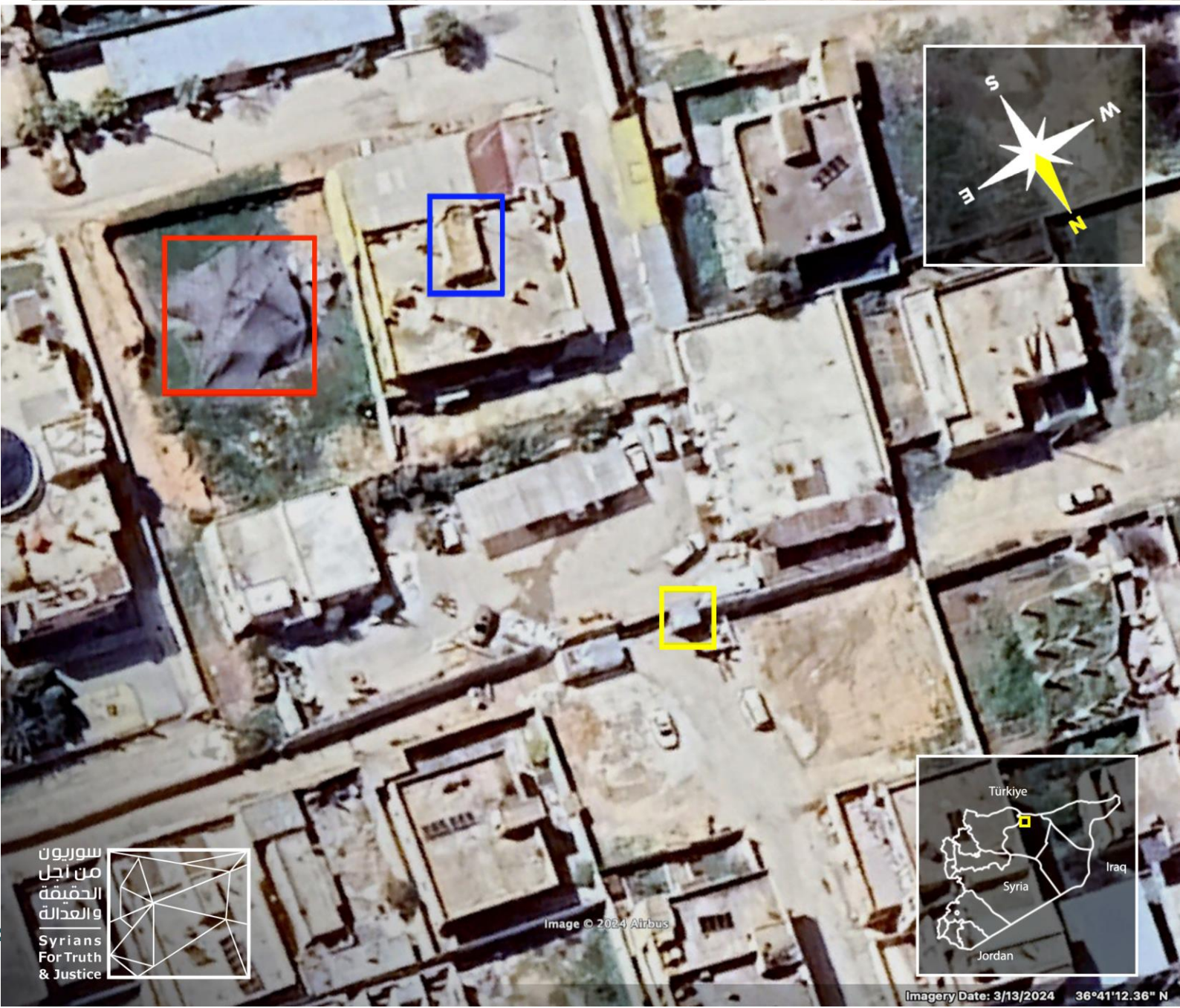


Image 26: A satellite image of the Turkish Counter-Terrorism Police (TEM) headquarters ([GPS coordinates: 36.686799, 38.941395](#)), along with an image of headquarters No. 1 (Credit: [video published on the account of Turkish Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu on the X platform](#)).



ABOUT STJ

Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) started as an idea in a co-founder's mind while attending the U.S. Middle-East Partnership Initiative's (MEPI) Leaders for Democracy Fellowship program (LDF) in 2015. The idea became a reality and flourished into an independent, non-profit, impartial, non-governmental human rights organization.

STJ's beginnings were more than humble; initially, it only reported stories of Syrians who experienced arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance, or torture. Planted in fertile soil, the seed of this project grew into an established human rights organization licensed in the Middle East and the European Union. STJ today undertakes to detect and uncover violations of all types committed in all Syrian parts by the various parties to the conflict.

Convinced that Syria's diversity is a wealth, our researchers and volunteers serve with unfailing dedication to monitor, expose, and document human rights violations that continue unabated in Syria since 2011, regardless of the affiliation of the victims or perpetrators.

