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Investigation: The Syrian Regime Used Cluster Munitions to Target a Gathering of IDPs Camps in Northwestern Idlib City

Russia Backed the Syrian Regime in the Attack



SNHR
SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

Tuesday , March 21, 2023

The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), founded in June 2011, is a non-governmental, independent group that is considered a primary source for the OHCHR on all death toll-related analyses in Syria.

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I. Introduction and Methodology

The millions of internally displaced people (IDPs) living in northwestern Syria continue to endure a reality which is beyond bleak. For years, they have been living in displacement after being forced to flee their homes by bombardment and ground-based and aerial attacks by the Syrian regime and its Russian and Iranian allies, with no chance of any return in the foreseeable future in light of the long-deadlocked political process, which has been at an impasse for some years now. Making the IDPs' situation even more tragic and intolerable is the relentless pressure imposed by Russia which is now threatening to cut off their last remaining lifeline, namely the provision of UN relief aid, through using its veto powers against extending the mandate of the mechanism for UN cross-border humanitarian assistance. Even inflicting all of this suffering has apparently not enough to satisfy the Russian-Syrian alliance, however, since they have also continued to launch ground-based and aerial attacks that, in many cases, target civilian areas and vital facilities, including IDPs' gathering places/camps in order to rob the areas outside the regime's control of any semblance of safety and stability.

The impunity granted to the Syrian regime, coupled with the failures of the political process, have encouraged the regime to carry out more attacks on IDPs gatherings/camps as part of a wider policy that aims to demean, terrorize and persecute civilians even after their displacement, using every weapon at its disposal, including internationally prohibited ones. One prominent example of such weapons is the internationally proscribed cluster munitions that have been heavily deployed by the Syrian regime. Indeed, since the Russian intervention began on September 30, 2015, we at the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) have documented a notable increase in the frequency of the use of cluster munitions. [SNHR has also issued numerous reports summarizing our exhaustive investigations into the attacks by the Russian-Syrian alliance on IDPs gatherings/camps.](#) Our team has been working for the past two years on a report specifically on attacks against IDPs gatherings/camps which is set to be released in the near future.

It should be noted that SNHR is a member of [the International Campaign to Ban Landmines - Cluster Munition Coalition \(ICBL-CMC\)](#). SNHR regularly provides the campaign with data documented by our team on the ground in Syria, which includes information on the casualties, the location of each incident, and the results of our attempts to identify the party that used cluster munitions in each case, which, in Syria's case, is either the Syrian regime or the Russian regime, as we have encountered no case of cluster munitions being used by any parties to the conflict apart from the Syrian and Russian regimes since we began our work 12 years ago.

Methodology

This report sheds light on the most recent attack involving the use of cluster munitions which targeted a number of camps in western Idlib city on November 6, 2022. The report provides confirmation that the attack was carried out by Syrian regime forces.

For this report, SNHR used an investigative approach, based on collecting and interpreting evidence, corroborating data, and first-hand accounts in a scientific process, whose aim is to collect, organize, and analyze materials and testimony in order to reconstruct the incident as it happened. In this process, we relied on the work of field researchers who work with SNHR to collect first-hand accounts from survivors, victims' relatives, relief workers, and media activists, utilizing the extensive network of relationships that we have built up over the course of 11 years. To this end, this report includes 10 first-hand accounts. We informed all of the individuals interviewed of the purpose of the report beforehand, and they gave us permission to use the information they revealed in the service of the report's objective and our documentation efforts, without offering or giving them any incentives. We also tried to spare the eyewitnesses the agony of having to remember the violation as much as it was possible, and we gave guarantees to not reveal the identity of anyone who opted to use an alias. Such procedures are part of our rigorous system of internal protocols, which we have maintained for years. We always strive to improve our protocols, so as to better take into account the victims' mental and emotional anguish.

SNHR has also analyzed relevant photos and videos published online, as well as others which we receive from local activists via e-mail, Skype, or on social media. The materials published by activists show the site of the attack, the bodies of the victims, the injured, and the massive destruction caused by the attack.

The investigation of cluster munitions attacks has a different character to that of other types of attacks involving other munitions, due to the nature of the weapon used, and how cluster bombs explode and scatter submunitions over wide areas. SNHR's team has faced various challenges during the course of the investigation, such as those posed by the fact that the targeted area houses camps, some of which were irregular in nature with no previous maps or photos available to refer to in the documentation process. Furthermore, the area adjacent to the camps, Ahrat al-Bassil, is of a military nature, making it difficult to access. Additionally, some of the residents had moved bomb remnants from the attack to other areas or already disposed of them, especially the rocket container shells, which made it difficult to pinpoint the location where they landed.

We retain copies of all the videos and pictures included in this report in a confidential database, as well as multiple backup copies on hard drives. We do not claim, however, to have documented all cluster munition attacks in light of the severe proscriptions and persecution imposed by Syrian regime forces and other armed groups. For more details, please see the [methodology](#) adopted by SNHR.

This report represents only the bare minimum of information regarding the actual severity and magnitude of the violations documented, and doesn't include any analysis of the profound social, economic, and psychological ramifications of these events.

II. The Geographic Location of the Site Targeted Using Cluster Munitions

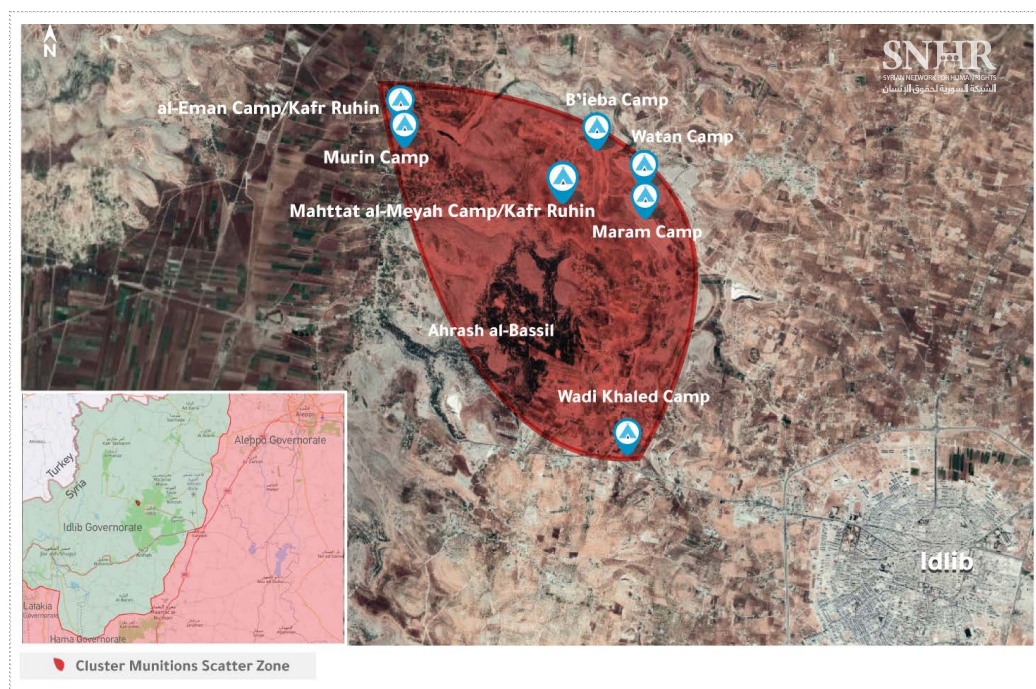
Scattered across the hilly area located in the northern and northwestern parts of Idlib city are a number of camps, most notably: Maram, Watan, Wadi Khaled, Mahattat al-Meyah/Kafr Ruhin, Murin, al-Eman/Kafr Ruhin, and B'ieba. Those camps extend from southwestern Kafr Jales town to the Murin village and Sahl al-Ruj. Ahrash al-Bassil, an area located in the southwest of this region, is a forested area covering approximately two kilometers that houses camps for Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). In 2013, armed opposition factions managed to take control of that area, before it was completely seized in 2017 by HTS. The area was under the joint control of armed opposition factions and HTS at the time of the attack.

III. Details of the Attack on the Camps in Northwestern Idlib City

On Sunday, November 6, 2022, at 06:54, Damascus time, forces located in an area under the control of Syrian regime forces and Iranian militias, who were, according to our investigations, stationed in al-Nayrab Military Airbase, used a rocket launcher to fire rockets carrying cluster munitions. SNHR suspects that the eight missiles were rockets judging from the remnants of the attacks. The rocket exploded successively in the sky of the hilly area that houses camps in northwestern and western Idlib city and Ahrash al-Bassil.

Following this attack, two fixed-wing warplanes believed to be Russian carried out four consecutive airstrikes on the Ahrash al-Bassil area. The first of these airstrikes was carried out at 07:39 and the last at 08:12.

Map showing the sites of the camps in northwestern Idlib city that was affected by the attack carried out by Syrian regime forces using cluster munitions, and the area over which the submunitions were scattered.



Our investigations confirm that the camps are civilian areas with no military presence or weapons arsenals for armed opposition factions or extremist Islamic groups present during or even before the attack. Additionally, the Syrian regime, i.e., the attacking force, did not send out any alert prior to the attack as required by the international humanitarian law.

According to the findings of the investigation by SNHR's team, this attack, which we believe was carried out by Syrian regime forces using cluster munitions, resulted in the deaths of no fewer than 11 individuals: nine civilians; including four children, two women, and unborn fetus, while two HTS fighters were killed in the attack targeting the Ahrash al-Bassil area. In addition, about 75 other people were injured, the majority of whom were civilians. Most of the victims were killed in the Maram IDPs Camp, where we documented the deaths of seven civilians, including four children and one woman and her unborn fetus.

Names of the victims



Azzam Bakier, infant boy



Amina al-Sraqbi, girl



Children injured in the ground-based attack carried out by Syrian regime forces using cluster munitions on IDP camps in western Idlib city - November 6, 2022



Through the SNHR team's monitoring operations, we pinpointed 29 of the sites where cluster munitions landed. Of those 29 sites, 26 were located in four of the IDP camps, where the attack caused various forms of material damage.

The link below shows [an interactive map](#) of sites where remnants from the attack involving the use of cluster munitions landed, causing material damage.

Furthermore, the bombardment drove most of the residents of the camps targeted by the cluster bombs and submunitions to flee to safer areas in fear of further attacks. Most of these IDPs returned to their camps a few days later. SNHR estimates that approximately 7,500 civilians were displaced by the attack.



Murin Camp residents fleeing

Below is a summary of the damage caused to the camp by the attack

SNHR's team was able to document the way in which remnants from the attack were scattered throughout four IDP camps in the impact zone. These sites, the Maram, Wadi Khaled, Mahattat al-Meyah/Kafr Ruhin, and Muron camps, suffered various types of material damage, with the Maram Camp being the worst affected by the attack.

Maram Camp¹ :

Our investigations verified 15 sites where remnants and submunitions left by the bombardments were found. The sites were mainly distributed across three sectors of the camp. The attack on Maram Camp killed seven civilians, including four children, one woman, and her unborn baby. The attack also caused a fire to break out in one of the tents, as well as causing various degrees of damage to dozens of other tents, ranging from slight and moderate to heavy.

1. Regular camp located around 4.5 km to the west of Idlib city. Established in January 2021, the camp is composed of eight sectors and includes over 1,300 tents housing 700 families.



Maram Camp

SNHR spoke with Moatesm Adad,² the head of the Maram Camp who was in his house near the camp at the time of the attack: **“Around 6:45, I heard the distant sounds of bombardment that were getting closer and closer. I did not expect that the camp was the target. However, I started seeing consecutive explosions on the land of the camp, especially sector F. I got into my car and headed for the camp, which is around 1.5 kilometers from my home. On my way there, I saw most of the camps’ residents trying to take shelter among the olive trees. In that camp, it was a terrifying sight and the smell of gunpower was everywhere. I saw the ‘martyr’ Karama with his children, and he had lost half his head.”** Moatesm added, **“Most of the injured were from the al-Shamali, al-Ibrahim, and al-Saraqbi families. The attack also caused heavy material damage to 65 tents.”**

We also spoke with Firas Mohammad Malek al-Khalaf,³ originally from Ebleen village in Jabal al-Zawiya, who has been living in the Maram Camp for a year. He recalled: **“The bombardment started around 6:45. It started with a strong explosion followed by smaller ones, causing a panic among the residents who fled the camp. I could not identify from where the rockets were fired, but the ones that sank into the ground suggest they originated from the northeastern side.”** Firas added, **“I did not expect for the camp to be targeted. It is not close to any fronts or hot spots.”**

Visual evidence showing the sites where some of the remnants and submunitions from the attack by Syrian regime forces involving the use of cluster munitions landed in Maram Camp, western Idlib city. The attack took place on November 6, 2022

2. Via WhatsApp on November 9, 2022

3. Via WhatsApp on November 12, 2022



Wadi Khaled Camp⁴:

The remnants of the rockets used in the attack were scattered between the tents in the Wadi Khaled Camp, causing various types of material damage ranging from slight to moderate. SNHR team verified five sites where remnants landed. One of the camp's residents was killed in the attack, while 19 other civilians were injured.

We spoke with Ahmad Eid al-Hussein,⁵ the head of the Wadi Khaled IDPs Camp, who told us: **“The first bombardment was in the north of our camp, but we thought the target was a military point. That is until the Civil Defense teams [White Helmets] came to our camp and told us that the Maram Camp had been bombed. The time window between the two attacks on the two camps was around five to six minutes.”** Ahmad added that this was the first time the camp was targeted using cluster munitions: **“We found containers about 20 meters or 30 meters outside the camp, and we found about three or four inside the camp, while all the others were outside and between the sectors.”** Ahmad told us one of the resident was killed, saying: **“He died while I was carrying him and trying to evacuate him. A splinter hit his head and killed him.”**

We also spoke with H.A.,⁶ an internally displaced man from the southern suburbs of Aleppo who has been living in Wadi Khaled Camp since April 2018. He recalled: **“The bombardment started around 6:45 in the morning. It started from Maram Camp which I can see from my tent that is located in the northern side of [Wadi Khaled] camp at the highest point. It felt like the area there had turned into a volcano with how many explosions. About seven minutes later, I heard the sound of around three to four rockets in our skies. The bombs from the explosion scattered across the camp and in its vicinity.”**

4. Irregular camp located in Idlib city about three kilometers to the south of Maram Camp. The camp is divided into sectors (al-Housh Sector, al-Manshara Sector, Sharaket Rima Sector, Qabl al-Tareeq State) and extends over an area of 1.5 km². The camp houses approximately 100 families.

5. Via WhatsApp on November 9, 2022.

6. Name was concealed as per his request, via WhatsApp on November 10, 2022.

The eyewitness added, “The munitions were cylinders with a diameter of about five centimeters and a length of around ten centimeters. The head of the rocket had a length of 30 centimeters and at its end was a cylinder with a diameter of two inches and a length of 50 centimeters.” When asked about the direction from which the bombardment originated, he answered, “I am 95 percent certain it came from the north, from Aleppo city particularly.”

Visual evidence showing the sites where some of the remnants from the attack by Syrian regime forces that involved the use of cluster munitions landed in Wadi Khaled Camp, western Idlib city. The attack took place on November 6, 2022



Mahattat al-Meyah/Kafr Ruhin Camp⁷:

Remnants and submunitions from the cluster bombs landed in various areas within the Mahattat al-Meyah/Kafr Ruhin camp, with SNHR’s team able to verify five of these sites. The attack on the camp killed a female IDP and injured about 12 others, [as well as killing four sheep](#). In addition, the caravans and service buildings in the camp were damaged to varying degrees.

7. A regular camp located in eastern Kafr Ruhin village, western suburbs of Idlib, about 900 meters to the west of Maram Camp. The camp houses approximately 1,110 families, most of whom are IDPs from the suburbs of Hama governorate and the suburbs of the two cities of Saraqeb and Ma’a’ret al-Nu’man in the southern suburbs of Idlib. The residents live in prefabricated structures, known as “caravans”, which were recently erected to replace the previous fabric tents.



SNHR spoke with Nader Rajab al-Kharnoubi,⁸ an internally displaced man from Saraqeb city who has been living in the camp for two years and nine months. He said, **“Around 6:55, we heard explosions. At first I thought it was coming from the Harsh [Ahrash al-Bassil] which is two kilometers to the south of the camp, then the splinters and rocks started falling on the caravans, with dust filling the place and blocking eyesight.”** Nader al-Kharnoubi told us that the bombardment originated from the east towards the west. About 30 minutes later, Russian warplanes, which he was able to identify by sight carried out an airstrike on the Ahrash al-Bassil area, **“I saw two rockets on the ground in the camp and four hand-sized cluster bombs.”** On the damages to the camp, he said, **“Most of the caravans were damaged, especially the ones in the southeastern side. The solar panels and water tanks were also damaged.”**

8. Via WhatsApp on November 12, 2022.



Hesham al-Hamou,⁹ from the suburbs of Saraqeb city who has been living in the camp since May 2020, told us, “We woke up around 6:30 to the sounds of explosions about 500 meters from the south, from the side of Maram Camp. The intensity of the sound would lead you to believe a war broke out there. We went out and were surprised at rockets heavily falling on our camp. We were not even able to see each other because of the dust. I was able to take some of my family members to a bathroom since it was built from blocks and it would be safer. I could not take the rest, however, with many cluster bomb fragments falling and exploding and the screams of children and women who were stuck in their tents. Those moments were among the worst I have ever experienced in the last 11 years, since the revolution started. The sight of the sky and rockets falling was terrifying.” Hesham continued, “Civil Defense teams took some time to arrive since they are based far from the camp and the road leading to the camp is bumpy, so we had to carry some of the wounded ourselves to the surrounding groves and evacuate the families from the camp to the surrounding villages in order to move them away from the bombardment sites.” Asked about the nature of the bombardment on their camp, Hesham said, “We are familiar with cluster rockets, and the civil defense teams told us they were cluster rockets. The container rocket, or the main container, landed around 100 meters from my tent, and the nearest tent was only 10 meters away. The rocket ejected a container for cluster bombs with a length of 1.5 meters in the middle of the camp and the bombs scattered. Some of the bombs landed in the camp. Also, we found many tiny, chestnut-sized metal balls in front of the tents. The source of those balls is always cluster bombs. This is known by the regular people, civilians, and military people.”

9. Via WhatsApp on November 12, 2022.

Murin Camp¹⁰:

SNHR was able to verify three sites where cluster rocket remnants landed within and outside Murin village. One of these remnants hit the Murin School's perimeter fence, slightly damaging the adjacent tents.



We spoke with Mohammad al-Hussein,¹¹ the head of Murin Camp who was internally displaced from the suburbs of Saraqeb city in the southern suburbs of Idlib. He recalled: **"The rocket remnants scattered inside the camp and in its vicinity. One of the remnants hit and damaged the fence of the school adjacent to the tents, but, praise be to Allah, that was before children came to the school."**

The other camps in the area where the remnants left by the attacks were scattered are the Watan Camp,¹² Eman Camp/Kafr Ruhin,¹³ and B'ieba Camp,¹⁴ with the damage being limited to areas in the vicinity of these camps.

We spoke with Foad, known as Abu Abdou,¹⁵ a resident of Watan Camp who was present when the attack occurred. He told us: **"The attack took place at around 7:00. The rockets landed between our camp and Maram Camp, and the damages to our camps were slight and were limited to the tents by the fence near Maram Camp."** Foad added that the bombardment caused massive panic among the camp's residents and drove them to flee the camp temporarily.

We also spoke with Abu Ahmad,¹⁶ head of the al-Eman camp and one of its residents, who recalled, **"The rockets exploded in the sky over the the camp, but landed about 150-200 meters to its west within agricultural lands."** Abu Ahmad added, **"According to what I was told by two female teachers living in the camp, a rocket landed in the school where the children of the camp go, but, praise be to Allah, the bombardment was before the children came to the school."** We found out that Abu Ahmad is referring to the Murin School (Halaqa Oula), which we mentioned earlier while detailing the damages it sustained in the paragraph about Murin Camp.

10. An irregular camp located to the south of Murin village, with some of the tents extending into Murin village itself, mainly adjacently to the Murin School (Halaqa Oula). The camp houses 80 families.

11. Via WhatsApp on November 9, 2022.

12. Regular camp located about 150 meters to the northeastern Maram Camp. The camp houses around 1,900 families.

13. Irregular camp, located in northern Kafr Ruhin village. The camp houses around 60 families.

14. A small irregular camp located to the east of B'ieba village in the western suburbs of Idlib. The camp is adjacent to a number of the camps that were affected in the attack involving cluster munitions - approximately 650 meters to the northwest of Maram Camp, and around 800 meters to the northeast of Mahattat al-Meyah/Kafr Ruhin.

15. Concealed his last name, via WhatsApp on November 9, 2022.

16. Concealed his name, via WhatsApp on November 8, 2022.

The nature of the cluster munitions used in the attack and identifying their types

Cluster munitions are designed with hollow interiors to allow them to hold submunitions. On exploding in the air, they eject a large number of these small bomblets or submunitions over a wide area with modern models covering an area of approximately 2500 m². Cluster munitions can be launched from ground platforms or artillery systems, or dropped by an air force. The quantity of submunitions contained in each cluster bomb can be as low as in the dozens or as high as 600, with most being designed to explode on impact. Cluster munitions are random by nature. In that, they are not specifically directed, with their precision being affected by the weather and other factors. In most cases, the munitions hit areas that are distant from the military points supposedly being targeted. They are particularly dangerous because of the unexploded bomblets left by their deployment, which remain long after the wars or conflicts in which they were used have ended. Approximately 10 to 40 percent of the cluster submunitions or bomblets from each bomb do not explode on the initial impact, leaving them as lethal miniature landmines, which claim more victims in addition to the ones killed by the initial bombardment. SNHR stresses that at least hundreds of cluster submunitions in Syria have turned into what are effectively landmines that can kill or maim civilians, as well as causing serious injuries, with hundreds of fragments from these bomblets penetrating victims' bodies. These injuries can lead to amputations, or tear arteries and blood vessels, in addition to potentially causing injuries to the eyes or ears. These lethal submunitions are heavily spread across Syria, in a way that obstructs the return of IDPs and the movement of relief workers, Civil Defense rescue workers and vehicles. They also pose a serious threat to the process of reconstruction and development. Their greatest danger, however, remains the threat they pose to children, with their bright primary colors attracting the curiosity and attention of younger children unaware of their lethal nature, who face the worst threat from them. [For years, SNHR team has monitored the heavy and repeated use of cluster munitions across Syria](#), where dozens of cities and towns, including residential and agricultural areas, were targeted.

Reviewing and analyzing the photos of the remnants left by the weapons found in the site, together with the information provided by the witnesses, in addition to examining the destruction in the aftermath of the attack, leads us to believe that a BM-27URGAN, 220mm rocket system was used in the attacks covered in this report. To be more specific, we have been able to narrow down the model of rockets used to two types - the 9M27K and 9M274K1. These are undirected, traditional rockets equipped with rocket engines that run on solid fuel, and can be equipped with different warheads, including cluster munitions. In this case, the 9M27K rockets each carried 30 cluster submunitions of the 9N210 variety, while [the 9M27K1 models each carried 30 cluster submunitions of the N2359 variety](#). [Due to their almost identical appearance, it was difficult to distinguish between the two types of cluster submunitions](#) without visual examination and access to photos showing the numbers on those cluster munitions.

The cluster munitions used are highly explosive and contain different explosive compounds that vary in number and weight according to the cluster submunitions. The 9N219 cluster submunitions are designed to engage individuals and non-armored vehicles in open terrain, with each containing 370-400 pre-manufactured metal fragments.

On the other hand, the N2359, which is also designed to engage individuals and non-armored vehicles in open terrain, contains about 95 pre-made fragments that [consist of metal bars](#). These fragments come in two sizes: the smaller ones, weighing 0.75 grams, are mainly intended to injure, maim and kill individuals, while the larger ones, weighing 4.5 grams, are intended to damage light armored vehicles and equipment.

Through speaking regularly with local activists on the ground, and from studying images and information posted on social media by the Civil Defense organization, we were able to obtain [two photos](#) of 9N235 cluster submunitions. Based on those photos, we highly suspect the rockets used in the attack were 9M27K1.

An observer named Abu Amin told us¹⁷ that the rockets were fired in two batches of four each: **“The Syrian regime used Uragan rockets before the Russian intervention. They were frequently launched from Hama Military Airbase to target the north. After the Russian intervention, however, those rockets were more frequently used.”**

Visual analysis showing the munitions used by Syrian regime forces in their attacks on the camps in western Idlib on November 6, 2022

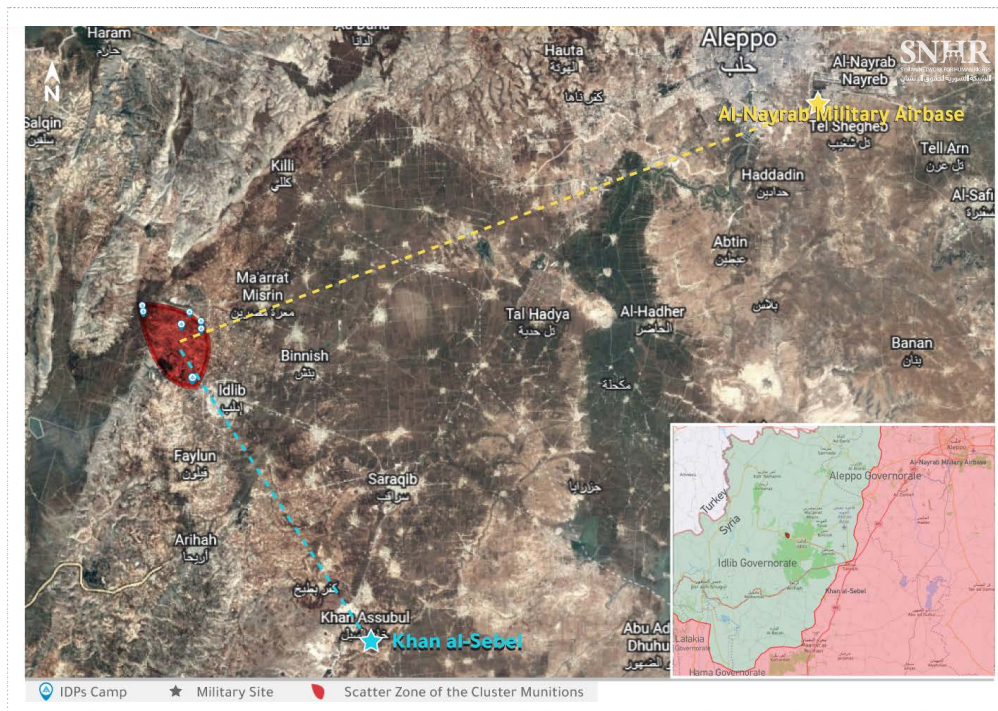


17. Via WhatsApp, on November 10, 2022.

IV. Determining the Source from Which the Rockets Carrying Cluster Munitions that Targeted the Camps Were Launched

Based on the initial data collected by the SNHR team, the locations from which the attacks were launched were probably al-Nayrab Military Airbase in Aleppo city (about 60 kilometers to the northeast of the area targeted in the attack) and Khan al-Sobol town in the southern suburbs of Idlib (about 30 kilometers to the southeast of the area targeted in the attack).

Map illustrating the locations of the camps affected in relation to al-Nayrab Military Airbase in Aleppo city and Khan al-Sobol town in Idlib.

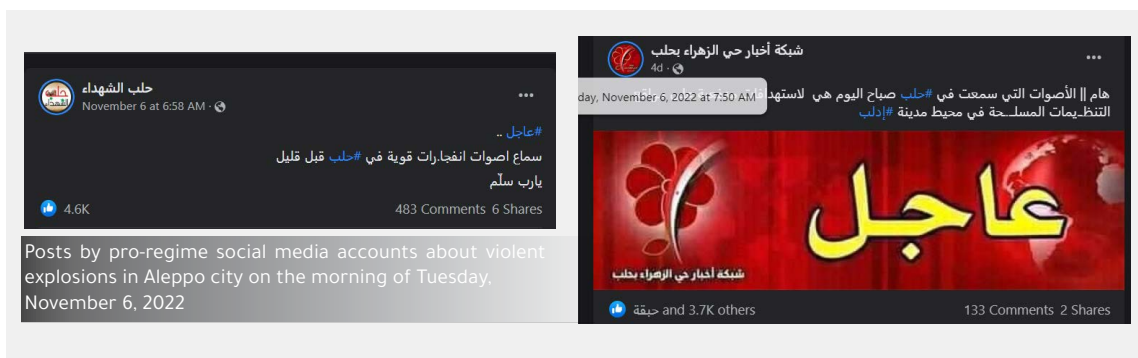
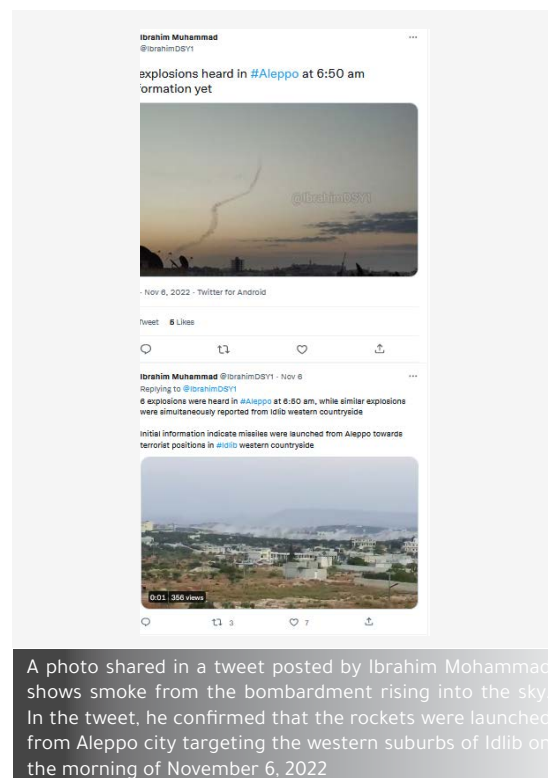


Eyewitness Hesham al-Hammou,¹⁸ a resident of the Mahattat al-Meyah/Kafr Ruhin Camp, said he saw the rockets that landed in his camp originating from the direction of Maram Camp, which supports the hypothesis that the source of the bombardment was al-Nayrab Military Airbase. Furthermore, another eyewitness, K. A., a resident of Wadi Khaled Camp, confirmed that the bombardment of his camp originated from the north, specifically from Aleppo city.

We also spoke with one of the observers, Abu Amin, who was in Jabal al-Arba'in, southern Idlib governorate, at the time of the attack. He told us: **"The rockets originated from the east, travelling towards the west, specifically, I believe, from al-Nayrab Airbase. We observed it before the observatories on the coast, which eliminates the possibility of the attack originating from somewhere else."** He added, **"Those rockets are long-range rockets that are launched from distant points. They could not be possibly close to dividing lines. If the rockets had been launched from a nearby area [near Saraqeb], the smoke would have stayed in the air for a period of time and it would have been visible to everyone."**

18. Via WhatsApp on November 10, 2022.

Moreover, we monitored pro-regime social media accounts that focus on the areas surrounding northwestern Syria. We monitored [posts about people hearing violent sounds in Aleppo city](#) in tandem with the time of the attack on the IDPs gathering. Some of the residents in those areas commented that the sounds came from al-Nayrab Airbase. For instance, Ibrahim Mohammad, a former military servicemen with Syrian regime forces who resides in Aleppo according to his Twitter account, posted [a tweet](#) at 07:01 on November 6 saying he heard strong explosions in Aleppo city followed by a comment saying that the sounds were for rockets that were launched from Aleppo towards the “terrorists” in western Idlib suburbs.



[Activists who monitor bombardment](#) confirmed that the area of northwestern Syria was subjected to ground-based and aerial attacks between 6:54, the time of the attack, and 7:33, “which was artillery shelling by Syrian regime force on the vicinity of al-Sarmaniya village”, raising the possibility that the bombardment witnessed by the residents of Aleppo city was the same attack on the camps’ area.

To investigate further, we spoke with residents and local people living in Idlib city to ask them what they had seen at the time of the bombardment. They told us they heard sounds of explosions coming from the northern side of the city, but said they did not see any rockets in the skies overhead at the time of the attack, which further confirms that rocket launchers stationed in Khan al-Sebel were not the source of the attack. If they had been, the rockets would have been visible in the sky over Idlib city.

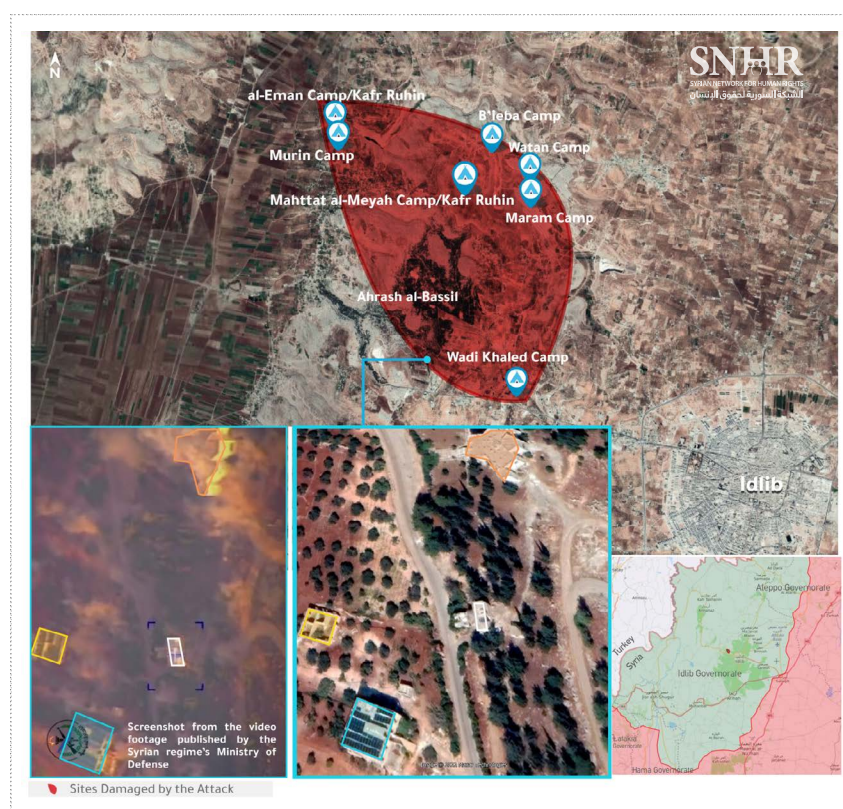
Based on the facts above, we can assert with some confidence that al-Nayrab Military Airbase is the source of the cluster munitions attack involving targeting the camps to the west and northwest of Idlib city.

V. Proof of the Syrian Regime's Involvement in the Attack

On November 7, 2022, the official website of the Syrian regime's Ministry of Defense published [a statement](#) regarding an operation by Syrian regime forces in collaboration with the "friendly" Russian Aerospace Forces on the headquarters of the command and training wing of unnamed "terrorist groups". The time of this attack, its target location and the weapons used were not specified in this report, with the website only showing [video footage](#) of the launch of two batches of rockets from rocket launchers. At the end of the video, a list of eight names of those killed in this operation appears, with these individuals being identified as "trainers of terrorists". Our investigations showed that the names provided were fabrications, as they were completely unknown.

We, at SNHR, were able to identify some of the locations that appeared in the video published along with the statement issued by the Syrian regime's Ministry of Defense. These locations were identified as being in Ahrash al-Bassil to the northwest of Idlib city and to the south and southwest of the camps' area which was targeted using cluster munitions. Between 1:26 and 1:35, in the video, successive explosions are shown in al-Ahrash area, with the nature of these blasts suggesting they are explosions of cluster munitions. [At 2:10](#), in the video footage, we see what seems to be the launch of a rocket carrying cluster munitions that begin to explode once the rocket hits a building. At 2:26, the same building is shown after being hit with this rocket. With the help of local activists, and by cross-referencing the buildings via Google Earth, we were able to determine that the targeted building is located on the southern side of Ahrash al-Bassil ([35°56'54.1"N 36°34'32.0"E](#)). [Around 1.4 kilometers to the east of this building is Wadi Khaled, while Mahattat al-Meyah/Kafr Ruhin is located 2.4 kilometers to the building's north. An activist confirmed to us that he saw the building being targeted on the day of the attack, which also raises the possibility that the video in the statement shows the same attack that is the subject matter of this investigation.](#)

Map showing one of the sites that were targeted in an attack involving the use of cluster munitions that was carried out by Syrian regime forces, as seen in the video published by the Syrian regime's Ministry of Defense on November 7, 2022



On November 8, the Syrian regime's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates published [a statement](#) on its official website stating that "attacking terrorists who are affiliated and connected to al-Qaeda, ISIS, and other terrorist groups based in northwestern Syria and south Syria is the prerogative and duty of the Syrian state in order to protect its citizens and ensure the safety and integrity of its lands."

The Syrian regime's government ignores the fact that bombardment in cases of internal armed conflicts is subject to the rules of international humanitarian law and cannot be carried out with no regard for distinguishing between civilians and fighters. Also, targeting camps and civilians areas is prohibited under international law.

Russian logistical support for the Syrian regime in the attack on the camps

This attack took place one day after a statement by Oleg Yegorov, the deputy head of the Russian Reconciliation Center for Syria, in which he claimed that "According to the information obtained by the Russian Reconciliation Center for Syria, militants of the Nusra Front [the term used by the Kremlin for Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, outlawed in Russia, according to TASS], together with the 'White Helmets' pseudo-humanitarian organization plan to carry out provocations in the Idlib province." The Russian official added, "The militants plan to film staged footage of staged strikes near refugee camps near the settlements of Kafr Dian and Kafr Jales in the Idlib Province." Yegorov's statement was published in a report carried by the [Russian news agency](#) RIA Novosti on November 5.

According to SNHR's investigations, Russian reconnaissance planes overflew the area of the attack the day before it, which suggests the Russian side, as well as their Syrian regime allies, were fully aware of the nature of the area and its status as a location of IDP camps, not to mention the civilian houses in the villages and towns of the area.

Furthermore, Russian airplanes carried out an attack following the one involved the cluster munitions. The Russian attack targeted the military area of Ahrash al-Bassil. The preemptive propagandistic statements by a Russian official citing fabricated attacks on the same area targeted in the attack involving cluster munitions confirm that the latter attack was carried out with the coordination and backing of the Russian side.

At the conclusion of the 19th rounds of Astana Talks, held in the Kazakhstani Capital Astana, on November 22-23, with the participation of the guarantor states (Turkey, Russia, and Iran), as well as a delegation from the Syrian regime and another one from the Syrian opposition, the Kazakhstani Ministry of Foreign Affairs published [a closing joint statement](#) on its official website by the representatives of the guarantor states. The statement contained no condemnation of the attack.

VI. Conclusions and Recommendations

1. Our investigation conclusively proves the Syrian regime's responsibility for these attacks, as well as confirming the type of the weapon used, the location from which the attacks originated, and the resulting casualties and damages. These attacks caused new forced displacements and additional physical, mental and emotional suffering for thousands of IDPs.
2. Syrian-Russian alliance forces have categorically violated Security Council resolutions 2139 and 2254 that call for ending indiscriminate attacks,²⁰ as well as violating a large number of the rules of customary international humanitarian law.²¹ Furthermore, through the crime of murder, the Syrian-Russian alliances forces have violated Article 7 & 8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC),²² with these violations constituting war crimes and crimes against humanity.
3. These bombardment operations have collaterally caused loss of civilian lives, injuries, and/or heavy damage to civilian objects. There are also significant strong indicators suggesting that the damage was exceptionally excessive in relation to the anticipated military advantage. In most cases, the attacks did not distinguish between civilians and military fighters; indeed, it seems that some of the attacks deliberately targeted vital facilities and civilian areas.
4. The use of cluster munitions by Syrian regime forces, under the leadership of the Commander-in-Chief, Marshal Bashar Assad, and by Russian forces violates both the principles of distinction and proportionality according to international humanitarian law, which constitute a war crime.
5. States unanimously agreed at the World Summit 2005²³ that every state is responsible for the protection of its residents against crimes against humanity and war crimes. This responsibility entails the prevention of such crimes, including the prevention of incitement to commit them by all possible means, and when the state clearly fails to protect its population from crimes of atrocity, or is itself is committing such crimes, as in the case of the Syrian regime, this means that it is the responsibility of the international community to intervene to take protective measures in a collective, decisive and timely manner.²⁴
6. The cluster munition attacks on IDPs camps and civilian gatherings have created a state of terror and fear among the displaced, substantially exacerbating their already-catastrophic situation which already suffers from an extremely poor humanitarian response.

20. The resolution also specifically mentions "the obligation to distinguish between civilian populations and combatants, and the prohibition against indiscriminate attacks, and attacks against civilians and civilian objects as such." United Nations Security Council, Resolution 2139 (2014), Paragraph 3. [https://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?OpenAgent&DS=S/RES/2139\(2014\)&Lang=E](https://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?OpenAgent&DS=S/RES/2139(2014)&Lang=E)

"Demands that all parties immediately cease any attacks against civilians and civilian objects as such, including attacks against medical facilities and personnel, and any indiscriminate use of weapons, including through shelling and aerial bombardment," United Nations Security Council, Resolution 2254 (2015), Paragraph 13. [https://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?OpenAgent&DS=S/RES/2254\(2015\)&Lang=E](https://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?OpenAgent&DS=S/RES/2254(2015)&Lang=E)

21. "The parties to the conflict must at all times distinguish between civilian objects and military objectives. Attacks may only be directed against military objectives. Attacks must not be directed against civilian objects." International Committee of the Red Cross, Rule 7 of the international humanitarian law. <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl/v1/rule7>

"Indiscriminate attacks are prohibited." International Committee of the Red Cross, Rule 11 of the international humanitarian law.

22. Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Articles 7 (1-a) and Article 8-2 (a-i).

23. United Nations General Assembly, 2005 World Summit Outcome <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/60/1>

24. United Nations General Assembly, 2005 World Summit Outcome <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/60/1>

7. International humanitarian law stresses that civilian objects must be provided with special protection. By the same law, targeting those objects constitutes a war crime. Article 52 of Protocol I to the Geneva Convention²⁵ defines civilian objects as “all objects which are not military objects... Military objects are limited to those objects which by their nature, location, purpose or use make an effective contribution to military action and whose total or partial destruction, capture or neutralization, in the circumstances ruling at the time, offers a definite military advantage.” Civilian objects include medical facilities, educational facilities, infrastructures, places of worship, and other facilities that are used for civilian purposes.
8. Syrian-Russian alliance forces have violated the de-escalation agreement in all the zones to which it applies, as well as in the areas of Idlib. Those forces have violated the Sochi agreement by bombing a number of villages in towns in de-escalation zone 4.

Recommendations

Security Council

- The Security Council should take further action after the adoption of resolution 2254, which explicitly “demands that all parties immediately cease any attacks against civilians and civilian objects as such.”
- The Security Council should adopt a resolution to establish a ceasefire in Idlib that must involve punitive procedures in cases of non-compliance for all parties involved.
- Show serious support for the peace process in Syria and bring about a fair political transition that ensures safety and stability.
- The Syrian dossier should be referred to the International Criminal Court, and all those involved in crimes must be held accountable, including the Russian regime whose involvement in war crimes have been well-proven.
- The Security Council should adopt a special resolution prohibiting the use of cluster munitions in Syria, as with the prohibition of the use of chemical weapons. This resolution should address how to remove the remnants of this dangerous weapon.
- The use of cluster munitions by the Syrian and Russian regimes threatens the safety and security of tens of thousands of Syrians. The Security Council should intervene directly and urgently to protect the Syrian people from the onslaught of the ruling authority, which constitutes a war crime.
- Send peace-keeping forces to protect IDPs and their camps from the attacks of Syrian regime forces.

25. Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions, Article 52 <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/api-1977/article-52?activeTab=1949GCs-APs-and-commentaries>

UN Secretary-General

- Condemn this senseless massacre in the strongest possible terms. The UN Secretary-General should also not ignore the deliberate killings of Syrian citizens.
- Clearly and explicitly identify the perpetrators of human rights violations which is a step towards their being convicted for their crimes and having their heinous practices exposed to the world. This also sends a message of solidarity to the people affected. Ignoring the explicit mention of the perpetrators of violations encourages them to repeat and commit more violations.
- Call on the Security Council to act urgently and hold a special meeting with the aim of establishing a ceasefire and protecting the lives of tens of thousands of displaced civilians.

International community

- In light of the division and the state deadlock at the UN Security Council, action must be taken at the national and regional levels to establish alliances to support the Syrian people. This can be achieved through protecting the Syrian people from the daily killings inflicted on them and lifting the siege placed upon them, as well as increasing relief aid, and seeking to activate the principle of universal jurisdiction with respect to these crimes before national courts in fair trials for all those involved.
- As a member of the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect SNHR has repeatedly called, in dozens of studies and reports, for the implementation of the principle of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). Since all political channels have now been consumed, first through the agreement sponsored by the Arab League and then the plan by Kofi Annan, the next natural step is to refer to Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations and implement the R2P principle which was established by the UN General Assembly. Instead, the Security Council is still hindering the protection of civilians in Syria.
- Renew the pressure on the Security Council in order to refer the dossier on Syria to the ICC.
- Work towards establishing justice and accountability in Syria through the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Council, and activate the principle of universal jurisdiction.
- The states supporting parties to the conflict in Syria, especially Russia, should apply pressure on their allies to neutralize the Idlib area from hostilities in order to protect over 4 million people living there.

UN General Assembly

- Hold the Russian and Syrian regimes responsible for this attack, and put pressure on the Security Council to take action in order to protect the Syrian people, and prevent Russia from claiming impunity simply on the grounds of its status as a permanent member of the Security Council.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

- The OHCHR should condemn this attack which resulted in a massacre, and submit a report on it to the Human Rights Council and other UN organs.
- Train Syrian organizations in the proper removal of landmines and unexploded cluster munitions, and raise awareness at the local level about such threats.
- Establish a platform to bring together the Syrian groups that are active in the two fields of documenting violations and humanitarian relief in order to exchange expertise with the Syrian people.

Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic

- Work to document this attack, which resulted in a massacre, and include it in the Commission's upcoming report while explicitly identifying the perpetrators.

UN Special Envoy to Syria

- Condemn this attack and stress that massacres, killings, and torture have shattered the peace process.

Syrian regime

- Cease the killing of Syrian citizens and respect the Syrian constitution and international law.
- Adhere to the rules of customary international humanitarian law, cease perpetrating crimes, and compensate the victims affected in this attack.

Appendix: Photos and Video Footage Documenting the Attack

- [Exclusive photos obtained by SNHR](#) show the remnants of the rockets used by the Syrian regime in the attack on Maram Camp
- [Exclusive photos obtained by SNHR](#) show some of the damage caused to Maram Camp in bu the attack
- [Video](#) showing the moment one of the remnants from the rockets hits Maram Camp
- [Exclusive photos obtained by SNHR](#) showing some of the damage caused to the Wadi Khaled Camp by the attack
- [Exclusive photos obtained by SNHR](#) showing the remnants from the munitions that landed in Wadi Khaled Camp following the attack
- [Video](#) showing Wadi Khaled Camp during the attack

- [Exclusive photos obtained by SNHR](#) showing some of the remnants of the bombardment and damage into caused in Mahattat al-Meyah/Kafr Ruhin Camp
- [Exclusive photos obtained by SNHR](#) showing the damage to Murin School (Halaq Oula) after remnants from one of the cluster rockets hit its perimeter fence.
- [Photos from open sources showing the sites](#) where the remnants of cluster rockets landed in Murin Camp and the surrounding area in its vicinity

Acknowledgment and Condolences

Our most heartfelt gratitude and condolences go to the residents of the camps and the local activists for their much-valued contribution to this report.



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