



## **Report “Russian Strikes on Syria’s Civilians: Cluster Munitions, Vacuum Bombs and Long-Range Missiles”**

Violations Documentation Center in Syria - VDC  
**November 2015**

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Violations Documentation Center in Syria (VDC)  
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# Contents

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|  |    |
|--|----|
| <b>1: Introductio</b> .....  | 01 |
| <b>2: Methodology</b> .....  | 03 |
| <b>3: Challenges</b> .....   | 05 |
| <b>4: The Attacks</b> .....  | 06 |
| 1) Attacks of 1 October 2015.....  | 06 |
| A- The shelling of Omar Bin al-Khattab Mosque in Jisr al-Shughur, Idlib Countryside.....                 | 06 |
| B- The Shelling of Baliyoun Village in Jabal al-Zawiya, Idlib Countryside.....                           | 07 |
| 2) Attacks of 3 October 2015.....  | 09 |
| A- The Shelling of Ehsim in Jabal al-Zawiya, Idlib.....  | 09 |
| 3) Attacks of 4 October 2015.....  | 10 |
| A- The targeting of Kafr Halab Village – Aleppo Suburbs.....   | 10 |
| B- The Shelling of Jabal al-Akrad in Latakia Governorate.....  | 11 |
| 4) Attacks of 7 October 2015.....  | 12 |
| A- The Shelling of Darat Izza, Aleppo Countryside, With Long-Range Missiles.....                         | 12 |
| B- The Shelling of Ma’saran village, Maarrat al-Nu’mān Eastern Countryside, Idlib Governorate.....       | 16 |
| 5) Attacks of 8 October 2015.....  | 17 |
| A- The Shelling of Khan Shaykhun City, Idlib Countryside.....  | 17 |
| 6) Attacks of 13 October 2015.....   | 17 |
| A- The Shelling of Darat Izza City, North-West of Aleppo city.....                                       | 17 |
| B- The Shelling of Hayyan Town in Northern Aleppo Countryside.....                                       | 18 |
| 7) Attacks on 15 October 2015.....   | 20 |
| A- The Bombing of al-Ghantu, Talbeesa, al-Rastan, al-Dar al-Kabera and Zafarana in Homs Countryside..... | 20 |
| 8) Attacks on 21 October 2015.....   | 20 |
| A- The Bombing of Rasim al-Hamam and Abu Khanadiq Village in Hama Suburbs.....                           | 20 |
| 9) Attacks of 22 October 2015 (Cluster Munitions).....   | 22 |
| A- The bombing of Hayyan Town in Aleppo Using Cluster Munitions.....                                     | 22 |
| 10) Attacks of 23 October 015.....   | 25 |
| A- The Shelling of a Vegetable Market in Killi Town, Idlib.....  | 25 |
| 11) Attacks of 24 October 2015.....  | 26 |
| A- The Shelling of Hayyan Town in Aleppo Suburbs Using Cluster Munitions.....                            | 26 |
| 12) Attacks of 25 October 2015.....  | 28 |
| A- The Shelling of Sheikh Baraka Village in Idlib Suburbs.....   | 28 |
| 13) Attacks of 26 October 2015.....  | 28 |
| A- The Shelling of Kafr Zita in Hama Suburbs.....  | 28 |
| 14) Attacks on 27 October 2015.....  | 29 |
| A- The Shelling of Hayyan in Aleppo’s Northern Suburbs.....  | 29 |
| B- The Shelling of Um Mayyal in Hama Suburbs.....  | 30 |
| 15) Attacks of 28 October 2015.....  | 31 |
| A- The Shelling of Kansafra (Jabal al-Zawiya) in Idlib Suburbs Using Cluster Munitions.....              | 31 |
| 16) Attacks of 29 October 2015.....  | 31 |
| A- The Shelling of al-Myaser Neighborhood in Aleppo Using Cluster Munitions.....                         | 31 |
| B- The Shelling of Kafr Owaid Village in Idlib Suburbs.....  | 32 |
| 17) Attacks of 30 October 2015.....  | 34 |
| A- The Targeting of al-Kastin Village in Jisr al-Shughur Suburbs, Idlib Governorate.....                 | 34 |
| B- The Targeting of the Aleppo’s Eastern Neighborhoods.....  | 35 |
| 5: Mass Displacements as a Result of the Russian Strikes.....  | 37 |
| 6: Conclusion and a Legal Assessment.....  | 37 |
| • Distinction.....   | 38 |
| • Targeting of Civilians.....  | 39 |
| • Types of Weapons.....  | 40 |
| • War Crimes.....  | 41 |



## 1: Introduction

In the immediate wake of Russia's announcement<sup>1</sup> that it had started military operations in Syria, [the Violations Documentation Center \(VDC\)](#) issued a [flash report](#)<sup>2</sup> listing the attacks that took place on that day, 30 September 2015, specifically in the towns and villages of the northern suburbs of Homs, namely Zaafarana, Talbiseh and Rastan, in which more than 43 civilians, including seven women and nine children, were killed. The victims' names were documented after being verified by VDC's correspondent in the northern suburbs of Homs.

On 3 October 2015, [RT Arabic](#) correspondent Sherine al-Ali [reported](#)<sup>3</sup> that Russia had started attacks on the northern suburbs of Homs, adding that the area was witnessing a large presence of militants from the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and al-Nusra Front. She stressed that Talbiseh city and Mashajjar area were also targeted in the strikes. However, as previously mentioned in the report by the [VDC](#), the shelling of the cities and towns of Zaafarana, Talbiseh and Rastan by Russian warplanes resulted in the death of 43 civilians<sup>4</sup>, including several children, according to eyewitness reports and the VDC's field correspondent. Moreover, local activists stressed there was no ISIS presence in the targeted area, despite claims by Russian media.

This report covers investigations of the period from 30 September-30 October 2015, i.e. the first month of the Russian offensive in Syria. In keeping with our methodology for documenting military attacks, the report lists the attacks<sup>5</sup> that we conclusively know to have been conducted by Russian forces against civilian locations. These attacks, which number 24 strikes in total, will be described in detail hereafter, along with an index of the civilian victims, including women and children, whose names were verified and documented by the VDC.

It is worth mentioning that neither the airstrikes of the Syrian air forces, nor those of the US-led Coalition, that were carried out during the period under review against ISIS military posts are included herein. Nevertheless, a subsequent report will be issued in this regard. For further information, please visit the [VDC website](#).

Russian attacks on military targets, which number in the hundreds, are not included in this report, even in cases of disproportionate and/or excessive use of force.

During the preparation of this report, the research team noted that more than 90 percent of Russian attacks were launched against areas that are not under ISIS control. For example, the attacks in the countryside of Latakia and Hama, Aleppo and its countryside, Idlib and its countryside, and Damascus suburbs, were carried out against anti-Assad battalions, affiliated either to Islamist groups or to the armed opposition and Free Syrian Army (FSA). It is also worth mentioning that this report will not cover dozens of unverified attacks, despite the fact that open sources (including media, revolutionary offices, social networks and coordination committees) reported that these attacks, which killed many civilians, were launched by Russian warplanes. This was due to a number of reasons, including the risks involved in moving from one targeted area to another, a lack of sufficient available informa-

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1- RT Arabic, 30 September 2014 "Press release by Russian Defense Ministry spokesperson": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qblmOvkV9KM>

2- Violations Documentation Center in Syria (2015). Flash Report - Russian Airstrikes in Syria; 30 September 2015: [http://www.vdc-sy.info/index.php/en/reports/1444252328#\\_VkHsAV7eF\\_k](http://www.vdc-sy.info/index.php/en/reports/1444252328#_VkHsAV7eF_k)

3- See RT Arabic; 3 October 2015; a report by Sherine al-Ali. RT near the areas of the Russian Attacks: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kuj1YhTz5NQ>

4- For more information see: Violations Documentation Center in Syria website; Victims of 30 September 2015, Homs.

5- In some attacks, Russian forces used long-range missiles.

tion, regular electricity and internet failures and – most importantly – the general state of panic among local residents resulting from the intensity of Russian airstrikes, leading many to flee their homes and seek refuge in safer areas. This disclaimer by no means though implies that these attacks were launched on military locations, as claimed by Russia’s defense ministry, which stated that all their attacks, which were [announced](#)<sup>6</sup> on 30 October 2015, exclusively targeted military sites. According to Russian military sources, the Russian Air Force has conducted some 1,400 sorties in Syria since the start of its counterterrorism operations, eliminating more than 1,600 terrorist targets in one month.

**The 81 cases of unverified attacks, which we are unable to provide further details on, were as follows:**

- 1 October: Hubeit town in Idlib’s southern countryside.
- 12 October: Tal al-Sultan and Jabal Azzam School in Aleppo’s countryside.
- 13 October: Ein Laroz and Tal al-Sultan, near Maarrat al-Nu’man in Idlib.
- 14 October: Tahitaya in Khan Shikhoun in Idlib’s countryside and Jaboul and Tal-Sabieen areas in Aleppo’s countryside.
- 15 October: Tawama- Atareb Road in Aleppo’s countryside.
- 16 October: Zarba and Zeitan areas and Sabiqia village in Aleppo’s countryside; on Zarba in Aleppo’s countryside, [Kafer Karmin village](#)<sup>7</sup> in Idlib’s countryside and [a mosque in Ter Maala](#) in the northern part of Homs’ countryside.
- 17 October: [a hospital in Zarba village](#) in Aleppo’s countryside and [Marj al-Sultan](#), Nola, Rakabiya, Nashabiya, Bazina and Harasta in the Eastern Ghouta of Damascus.
- 18 October: hospitals in Hader and al-Eis in the southern countryside of Aleppo, Shiekh Ali village in Aleppo’s countryside and [Ghanto](#) in Homs’ countryside.
- 19 October: al-Bab city, Bayanoun, Hayyan, Haritan and Anadan in the northern countryside of Aleppo and Kafar Karmin in Idlib’s countryside.
- 20 October: Sarmin town in Idlib, on Khan Toman, Zarbba village, Hader, Tal Hajjar, Mathanat al-Faysal and the vicinities of Tel Rifaat in Aleppo’s countryside.
- 21 October: Rahjan village in Hama’s countryside and Rastan city in Homs’ northern countryside.
- 22 October: Bayanoun, Hader, [Zarba](#), Orm al-Kubra, al-Dana Road in Aleppo’s countryside and Ghanto, Ter Maala, Darat al-Kabira and Talbiseh in Homs’ countryside.
- 23 October: Khan Touman, Zarba, Khalisa, al-Eis, Zitan, Qarasi, Huwiz and Bakarqoum in Aleppo’s countryside and Arafa village in Hama’s countryside (Displaced Camp).
- 24 October: Zitan in Aleppo’s countryside, Latamna in Hama and Ter Maala in Homs.
- 26 October: Shiekh Baraka village (Idlib Sinjar), al-Eis School and Zitan mosque on 25 October.
- 27 October: Kafranbel in Idlib; on Zarba, Khalisa and Khan Touman and Banes in Aleppo’s southern countryside, Kafar Joun village in Aleppo’s western countryside, Amira village of Khan Shiekhoun in Idlib’s countryside, Ter Maala village and Talbiseh in Homs’ northern countryside, Tel Haya and Teimim in Aleppo’s southern countryside, Latamna in Hama and Maarrat al-Nu’man in Idlib.
- 30 October: several neighborhoods of Aleppo and Damascus Suburbs.

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6- For more information; RT, 30 October 2015, announcement by Andrey Kartapolov of Russia’s General Staff: <https://www.rt.com/news/320168-syria-russia-operation-month/>

7- VDC was informed that 10 people were reportedly killed in the attack.

## 2: Methodology

This report relied on over 42 testimonies and interviews, conducted either directly by the VDC's field reporters inside Syria, or by the VDC's researchers via Skype with eyewitnesses, survivors, doctors, relief workers, Civil Defense members and workers in observatories (signal interception facilities) all over the Syrian territory, whether in areas held by opposition forces or armed groups.

Moreover, the VDC research team analyzed hundreds of photos and videos of more than 105 documented airstrikes/attacks. As this report covers only the Russian attacks during the month of October 2015, our team has excluded strikes that are known to have been conducted by Syrian government forces or the US-led international anti-ISIS coalition.

Russian attacks on military targets, whether on ISIS or on other armed opposition groups, were also excluded from this report. However, it has been noted the majority of attacks that targeted military locations<sup>8</sup> were not launched on ISIS-controlled areas.

The investigation process involved the distribution of special forms to a team of researchers to monitor and document the Russian airstrikes on a daily basis, starting 30 September. The forms contained methods for identifying aircraft models and distinguishing Russian aircrafts from those of the US-led international coalition.

Our research on this aspect revealed that the majority of Russian air force attacks were conducted by a squadron, i.e. more than one warplane participated in each attack, while Russian jets can be distinguished by the shape of the plane, their high velocity, altitude and the high destructive power of the missiles dropped – especially the thermobaric (vacuum) bombs and cluster munitions (detailed later in the report).

After the VDC's research team documented the attacks, interviews were conducted with survivors, VDC field correspondents, Civil Defense members, doctors, and other eyewitnesses. Information obtained by the VDC was corroborated with evidence from observatories from all over Syria (many interviews were also conducted with observatory workers to better understand their own methodology for identifying and differentiating aircrafts, especially Russian ones). In an interview with the VDC, one of the observatory's radio operators, who chose to be called Nader Abu Mohammad (40), stated:

"In the beginning, we used 'old' traditional radios to monitor government warplanes that were shelling Syrian villages and towns. Shortly afterwards, dissident soldiers and retired pilots helped us obtain more advanced devices called 'signal scanners', through which we could intercept the signals from the warplanes that took off from military airports in several Syrian governorates, including Latakia, Hama, Homs, Damascus and Sweida. Each airport has a different signal frequency for take-off. When the plane approaches its destination, it receives another frequency from the military operation room of each area. After the Russian operations started on 30 September 2015, many Russian-speaking people assisted us in deciphering the different terms used by the Russian pilots, especially during the planes' take-off in order to warn residents as soon as possible.

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8- A total of 23 airstrikes on opposition military posts (locations not controlled by ISIS) were observed. These airstrikes targeted several factions, including: Ahrar al-Sham Islamic Movement, Sanadid Brigade in Damascus Suburbs, Division 13, al-Sham Legion, Al-Muhajireen wa al-Ansar Army, al-Mujahideen Army, the First Coastal Division and other FSA-affiliated battalions and brigades.

“Nevertheless, after the Russian offensive began, particularly in Idlib, the sorties of the Syrian Air Force stopped. The way the Russian jets conducted their airstrikes in squadrons, the aircraft model – which differs from the Syrian models, its high speed, and its larger size, in addition to the spoken orders, which were given in Russian, were all identifying factors. There are about 50 observatories from Qalamoun in Damascus Countryside to Aleppo. When the Syrian forces realized we were intercepting their signals, some pilots flying MiG-21 and MiG-23 fighter jets tried to avoid detection by not relaying any messages while taking off from the military airports.”

The VDC received a number of voice recordings obtained by observatories around Syria. The information contained within the recordings has been verified by Russian translators (these recordings were taken between 24 and 25 October 2015).

[Recording 1](#): “I cannot work. The device is not working. We will come to you. 235 copy. I received the package. I cannot work. The device is broken. 235 I have 10 tons of fuel.”

[Recording 2](#): “I did the first. In a few minutes I will execute the second.”

[Recording 3](#): “We are not hindering anybody. You can execute the third attack. Copy.”

A number of people interviewed by VDC noted that the Russian aircrafts are usually either preceded by one or two reconnaissance planes, or by a warplane that launches simulated attacks prior to the actual ones, unlike Syrian aircrafts, which randomly shell civilian areas resulting in a greater death toll among civilians.

Following this process, available data was then collated with news of attacks published by several official and privately-run Russian websites, including those published by Russia’s General Staff, Ministry of Defense, pro-government websites (like [RT](#)), and reporters covering the Russian airstrikes from Humaymim Airbase at [Bassel Al-Assad](#) Airport, Jableh city. Finally, all evidence was then compiled and further examined before being chosen to appear in this report.



Photo 1 and 2: Devices used to monitor the movement of Russian aircrafts in the observatories in Idlib.  
Source: pictures taken exclusively for VDC.

### 3: Challenges

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The VDC research team faced several challenges when preparing this report, most significant was determining the identity of each party responsible for the attack. There was much difficulty in establishing whether shelling was carried out by Syrian government or Russian aircraft without first having compared data with dozens of sources and reviewing hundreds of photos and videos.

Another challenge that emerged was distinguishing whether attacks had struck civilian or military targets, particularly in light of conflicting media reports between conflicting parties. According to eyewitnesses and VDC field reporters, some of the attacks, especially those detailed herein, intentionally targeted civilian areas which clearly posed no military threat. However, in other attacks, we were unable to determine with confidence whether Russian forces had observed the rules of international humanitarian law, specifically those relating to the proportionate use of force and the taking of all feasible precautions to avoid civilian casualties. The VDC's reporter in the countryside of Hama described several attacks that took place in the area that violated the laws of war with the use of indiscriminate and highly-destructive weapons, including vacuum bombs, which were dropped on vast areas without a specific military target.

The VDC investigated the large number of incidents that led to civilian loss of life, without precisely knowing the nature of the military target that was reportedly hit and whether or not Russian forces had intentionally shelled civilian targets.

For example, Russian aircrafts shelled a field hospital ([the Second Field Hospital](#)) in the city of [Latamenah](#) in Hama's countryside, at around 7:00 pm on 2 October 2015. The attack resulted in the injury of two of the hospital's staff members.

Later, on 7 October, child Muhammad Ali al-Qurabi was killed in a Russian airstrike on [Kafr Zita city](#), Hama countryside, according to activist Mahmoud al-Hamwi, who confirmed to the VDC that vacuum bombs were used in the strike on the city's residential neighborhoods. Although armed clashes were erupting not far from Kafr Zita, specifically towards the east, the shelling was random and targeted civilian areas, according to activist Aous Hasan.

The incident happened again on 23 October 2015, when the same hospital in Latamenah city was targeted at around 9:40 pm. According to eyewitnesses, this was the third attack on the hospital, which provides medical services for residents of Latamenah and its surrounding villages (an estimated population of 35,000). The attack killed at least one civilian, who remains unidentified (likely a displaced person from a neighboring village). However, we were unable to obtain accurate casualty numbers as the shelling destroyed the entire hospital, according to eyewitness and testimonies by activists.

Moreover, at approximately 6:00 pm on 26 October 2015, [Russian airstrikes](#) again targeted Kafr Zita city, shelling the city's only specialized hospital with two missiles, activist Aous Hasan reported.



## 4: The Attacks

### 1- Attacks of 1 October 2015

#### A- The shelling of Omar Bin al-Khattab Mosque in Jisr al-Shughur, Idlib Countryside

At approximately 11.00 am, Russian aircrafts shelled a mosque in Jisr al-Shughur city, Idlib Countryside. According to eyewitnesses who met with researchers from our center, the targeted area was strictly civilian with no nearby military presence. Activist Tareq Abdulhaq (30), director of Jisr al-Shughur Coordination Committee, told VDC investigators:

“Omar Bin al-Khattab Mosque, located in the northern neighborhood of the city, was shelled by Russian aircrafts, instantly killing a young man and critically injuring the mosque’s Imam, who later died after succumbing to his wounds. Another seven people, including several children, were also injured in the attack. The targeted area was a public alley in the city.”

Tareq provided the center with the two victim details:

1- Marwan al-Ahmad

2- Imam: Abduljaleel al-Khaleel, who later died in Turkey on 27 October 2015 (26 days after the attack)

Marwan’s brother, Mustafa (25), a paramedic and a member of the Syrian Civil Defense in Jisr al-Shughur, confirmed to VDC that on the day of the strikes two Russian fighter jets attacked Jisr al-Shughur after flying over the city. As the jets returned, they shelled Omar Bin al-Khattab Mosque in the northern neighborhood of the city.

“The observatories told us ahead of the attack that Russian aircrafts were approaching. [My brother Marwan](#), a 19-year-old university student, was fixing the speakers of the mosque with Imam Abduljaleel al-Khalil when the Russian jets shelled the building. Marwan was killed instantly. We found his body under the debris, while the Imam sustained critical injuries that he would later succumb to. There was no military post or an armed group presence anywhere near that area.”



Marwan al-Ahmad, who died instantly in the attack.



A photo from outside showing the ruins of Omar Bin al-Khattab Mosque due to the Russian attack.  
Source: Mustafa al-Ahmad

Activist Tareq Abdulhaq provided VDC with a [video](#) depicting the destruction of the mosque following the Russian attack. The video, published on 1 October, also contained an interview with a Syrian Civil Defense member inside the mosque.

On 30 October, the official Russian Ministry of Defense [Facebook page](#) and [website](#) summed up the results of the Russian air group's actions in Syria. The ministry also published satellite images claiming "western media published [a] 'hoax' concerning the Al Farooq Omar Bin Al Khattab Mosque." The following image was published with the comment: "The photos show in detail that the mosque suffered no damage."



However, a VDC investigation, in cooperation with local eyewitnesses and activists from Jisr al-Shughur, confirmed the image portrays a different mosque named "Al Farouk", located approximately one kilometer from the targeted Omar Bin al-Khattab Mosque. Our center has also learned the placement of the title inset conceals the area of the actual targeted mosque, which should show the complete destruction of the building if the image was indeed current.



A satellite image prepared by the research team showing the position of the two mosques: Al Farouk Mosque on the left and Omar Bin al-Khattab Mosque to the right. N.B. Al Farouk mosque displays a dome while Omar Bin al-Khattab Mosque displays only minaret without a dome.

### B - The Shelling of Baliyoun Village in Jabal al-Zawiya, Idlib Countryside

According to VDC's researcher in Idlib, Mosaab al-Shbeib, Russian aircrafts launched an air-strike on Baliyoun village in Jabal al-Zawiya, Idlib's countryside, on the same day. A number of civilian houses were hit, leading to the death of four people. Our researcher denied the targeted area was a military post for any armed faction. Shbeib also provided the center with a list of the civilian casualties:

|   | Full Name                 | Gender       | Governorate and Area    | Notes   |
|---|---------------------------|--------------|-------------------------|---|
| 1 | Naji al-Mustafa           | Male Adult   | Idlib: Baliyoun Village | Killed with wife (Mariam al-Shiekh) in the attach         |
| 2 | Mariam al-Shiekh          | Female Adult | Idlib: Baliyoun Village | Killed with husband (Naji al-Mustafa) in the attach       |
| 3 | Dahham al-Mariee's sister | Female Adult | Idlib: Sahl al-Roj      | Displaced person from Enneb villege, killed in the attack |
| 4 | Unidentified              | Male Child   | Idlib: Sahl-al-Roj      | Unidentified child, likely from Enneb village as well.    |



## 2- Attacks of 3 October 2015

### A - The Shelling of Ehsim in Jabal al-Zawiya, Idlib

At about 2:15 pm on 3 October, two warplanes circled over Jabal al-Zawiya and Maarrat al-Nu'man. One of them shelled three adjacent poultry farms, south-east of Ehsim village, specifically between Ehsim and al-Barra near the ruins of Deir al-Wazna, where several villagers from Ehsim were earlier displaced due to random shelling on their village. The first attack led to several injuries among the villagers and to the partial destruction of the poultry farm. Syrian Civil Defense teams rushed to the area from Maarrat al-Nu'man and Balshoun village. At this time, the accompanying warplane launched a second attack on the area, resulting in the [massacre](#) of several people. Civil Defense member [Issam a-Saleh](#) from Balshoun village was killed, according to VDC's field researcher, Mosaab Shbeib, who was present at the time of the attack. Shbeib added:

"The two warplanes were white. It was remarkable that they flew from Latakia. We can usually distinguish the Russian aircrafts by observing several characteristics. First, they raid in groups. Obviously, each plane carries more munitions than missiles and bombs, because each aircraft usually hits three to five targets in each sortie, unlike the Syrian aircrafts, which usually only attack once and fly back. The place that was shelled did not house any battalion headquarters. On the contrary, it was clear that there were three poultry farms in the area. Moreover, there was neither a nearby military presence, whether tanks or vehicles, nor was there any ISIS presence, as the area is controlled by Ahrar al-Sham Islamic Movement."

**VDC interviewed Nader Abu Muhammad (40), a worker stationed in an observatory in Idlib (near Ehsim). Speaking via Skype, Abu Muhammad told VDC:**

"On 3 October 2015, four Russian warplanes took off from Basel al-Assad Military Airport (Humaymim Military Airbase). They were a squadron; unlike Syrian warplanes, which fly individually, Russian warplanes attack in groups. Two of the four Russian warplanes detached from the group and targeted an area in Jabal Zawia. From what we could gather from the Russian-speaking pilots, one of the jets was referred to as 'number 48'. Following the attack, we were surprised to see they chose to target an area with no military significance whatsoever; it was a poultry farm containing shelters for displaced people from Ehsim town."

Please click [here](#) to view a list of the casualties.



Satellite photo showing the targeted area in red.





Syrian Civil Defense member Issam al-Saleh  
Source: Syrian Civil Defense



Issam al-Saleh, Syrian Civil Defense member killed in the Russian airstrikes.  
Source: Syrian Civil Defense

### 3- Attacks of 4 October 2015

#### A- The targeting of Kafr Halab Village – Aleppo Suburbs

On 3 October, warplanes attacked [Kafr Halab village](#) in the south-western suburbs of Aleppo with advanced Russian-made cluster munitions; for unknown reasons, a number of these munitions failed to explode. Monitoring group Human Rights Watch (HRW) published a [report](#) on 10 October showing photos of SPBE sensor fused submunitions near Kafr Halab, adding that the incident is the first recorded use of this type of cluster munition in the Syrian conflict. According to HRW, the Russian-made munition descends by parachute and is designed to destroy armored vehicles by firing an explosive formed bullet of molten metal downward after detecting vehicles by targeting system.

#### **Activist Hussein Khattab told VDC:**

“There were three Russian warplanes hovering over the area during the hour of the attack. One of the aircrafts targeted the area between Kafr Halab, Sheikh Ali, and Arrad (mostly farmland), but there were no casualties. The observatories had already informed us before the attack that Russian warplanes had taken off from Latakia Airport.”



Remnants of SPBE sensor fused submunition in Kafer Halab, 4 October 2015.  
Source: [Sham Network](#)

## B- The Shelling of Jabal al-Akrad in Latakia Governorate

On 4 October 2015, Russian warplanes attacked Ghanimiya village in the Salma Township of Jabal al-Akrad, Latakia Governorate; inflicting a number of injuries but no deaths. VDC investigated the incident based on videos, photos and testimonies from local activists, in addition to testimonies from observatory workers in Latakia Governorate. Observatories are usually the first to detect an aircrafts' take-off from Basel al-Assad Airport (Jableh/Humaymim Airport), warning local residents and media offices when warplanes are detected flying over the city's suburbs prior to an attack. Observatories also inform other stations in Idlib, Hama, Aleppo, or Damascus Suburbs. With the exception of civilian targets attacked by the Russian warplanes, all the other attacks targeted Free Syrian Army positions. It is understood that ISIS has no presence inside Latakia Governorate.

### In a testimony for VDC, media activist Fadi Ahmad<sup>9</sup> revealed:

"In the early stages of the Russian campaign, warplanes targeted military locations of the armed opposition (FSA factions), notably the 1st Coastal Division and Decisive Storm Division. Later in the Russian campaign, we noticed a change in strategy; prior to the airstrikes, the entire region is now scanned by reconnaissance aircrafts, followed by a squadron of warplanes which carry out attacks on the set targets.

"On 4 October 2015, Russian warplanes attacked Ghanimiya village of Salma Township in Jabal al-Akrad, Latakia. Four missiles fell on civilian houses resulting in injuries to four civilians, including a woman and a child. There was no military presence in the targeted area or nearby surroundings. The attacking warplanes were a Sukhoi Su-30 model. The observatories usually inform local civilians, and us, particularly, following the arrival of Russian warplanes to Humaymim Airport – a facility that was previously known only to receive helicopters, unlike other airbases dedicated to fighter jets, such as Hama, Sheherat, and T4 (Tiyas). The observatories explained to us why the Russian warplanes fly in squadrons. They said that not all aircrafts in the squadron make the attack; for instance, if five warplanes take off, only two of them will attack, while the other two are for interception, and the last one is a fighter."

Activist Fadi Ahmad provided VDC with a video depicting the shelling of Ghanimiya village.



9- The true identity of the activist was withheld for security reasons.

#### 4- Attacks of 7 October 2015

##### A- The Shelling of Darat Izza, Aleppo Countryside, With Long-Range Missiles

In the morning of 7 October, at 6:58 am, two enormous explosions rocked the city of [Darat Izza](#) in Syria's west. No warplanes were heard in the vicinity of the explosions by locals or any of the observatories based throughout the Aleppo countryside.

Later that day, Russian Minister of Defense Sergey Shoygu [announced](#) that Russian warships in the Caspian Sea had launched dozens of cruise missiles of "high accuracy" [against](#) ISIS targets in Syria. A total of 26 cruise missiles travelled approximately 1,400 km to hit 11 targets in the governorates of Aleppo, Idlib and Raqqa, according to the ministry.

Russia's defense ministry released a [video](#) showing the missiles' flight path and locations of impact. The type of rocket used in the attack was the 3M14TE Kalibr-NK missile.

The ministry said the missile's circular error probability was "no more" than three meters, adding the attacks had targeted ISIS infrastructure, including missile and explosive manu-





**In his testimony on the Russian long-range missile attack on Darat Izza, media activist Rida Haj Bakri told VDC:**

"On 7 October, around 7:00 am, we heard the sound of two explosions that rocked Darat Izza. It was remarkable we didn't hear the sound of any warplanes before the incident. We hurried to the site of the explosions, where many houses had been completely destroyed and many civilians had were killed, including a woman and her two children (12 and 7) in addition to a man (23) who was killed with his wife (22) – they had been married five days prior."

Rida added that neither ISIS, or any other armed group, had a military presence inside the city.

"[T]here were no military targets in the area, and this is confirmed by the nature of those killed and injured, who numbered more than two dozen injured. Over 15 houses were also destroyed, while other houses were partially damaged up to 50 meters away from the site of the explosion."



Safaa Muhammad Bazar. Source: Media office in Darat Izza city.



Talal Muhammad Bazar. Source: Media office in Darat Izza city.





Remnants of a Russian-made missile. Source: Media office in Darat Izza city.



Site of destruction following the attack on 7 October. Source: Media office in Darat Izza city.

|   | Full Name                  | Gender       | Governorate and Area           | Date      | Notes   |
|---|----------------------------|--------------|--------------------------------|-----------|---|
| 1 | Juwaida Nasr Bazar         | Adult female | Aleppo countryside: Darat Izza | 7 October | Killed with her two children, Talal and Safaa |
| 2 | Talal Muhammd Bazar        | Child male   | Aleppo countryside: Darat Izza | 7 October | 12 years old; killed with mother and sister   |
| 3 | Safaa Muhammad Bazarsister | Child female | Aleppo countryside: Darat Izza | 7 October | 8 years old; killed with mother and brother   |
| 4 | Lina Janant ad-Daema       | Adult female | Aleppo countryside: Darat Izza | 7 October | 22 years old; killed with husband             |
| 5 | Mutaz ad-Daema             | Adult male   | Aleppo countryside: Darat Izza | 7 October | 23 years old; killed with wife                |

Media activist Ahmad Abu Sbaih confirmed to the VDC that the town's western neighborhood was shelled around 7:00 am. Ahmad stated that he did not observe the presence of any warplanes, although locals in nearby villages said they witnessed two missiles flying towards Darat Izza.

"I was awakened by the sound of the first missile, and the second came only seconds after. The scene of the explosion suggested that the two missiles had fallen vertically, with 250 meters between them. Three three-storeyed buildings were instantly destroyed, and four houses were totally destroyed, while around 50 houses were partially destroyed. My house is 200 meters away from location of impact; the windows and doors of my house were destroyed. Four people died immediately and 15 others were taken to Turkey for treatment of severe injuries."



Talal Muhammad Bazar. Source: Media office in Darat Izza city.

## B- The Shelling of Ma'saran village, Maarrat al-Nu'man Eastern Countryside, Idlib Governorate

M.A, an eyewitness who asked not to publish his name said: "On 7 October,, around 1:00 pm, Russian warplanes targeted the western neighborhoods of Ma'saran. There were two Russian warplanes flying over the village, a thermobaric (vacuum) missile hit the house of Yousef al-Kawkab, also known as Yousef al-Yousef, resulting in immediate death of nine civilians, eight of whom were members of the Yousef's family. The house fell down, crushing them. There was no military target there."

|    | Full Name                | Gender       | Governorate and Area    | Date      | Notes                              |
|----|--------------------------|--------------|-------------------------|-----------|------------------------------------|
| 1  | Safwan Ahamd al-Am-mori  | Adult male   | Idlib, Ma'saran village | 7 October | Killed by the attack               |
| 2  | Zainab Ali al-Hammadi    | Adult female | Idlib, Ma'saran village | 7 October | Killed by the attack               |
| 3  | Taha Yousef al-Yousef    | Adult male   | Idlib, Ma'saran village | 7 October | Killed by the attack               |
| 4  | Kawkab al-Hammadi        | Adult female | Idlib, Ma'saran village | 7 October | Killed by the attack               |
| 5  | Samira Hussien al-Yousef | Adult female | Idlib, Ma'saran village | 7 October | Killed by the attack               |
| 6  | Iman Yousef al-Yousef    | Child female | Idlib, Ma'saran village | 7 October | 15 years old; killed by the attack |
| 7  | Shaimaa Yousef al-Yousef | Child female | Idlib, Ma'saran village | 7 October | 5 years old; killed by the attack  |
| 8  | Fatima Yousef al-Yousef  | Child female | Idlib, Ma'saran village | 7 October | 3 years old; killed by the attack  |
| 9  | Taha Yousef al-Yousef    | Child male   | Idlib, Ma'saran village | 7 October | 11 years old; killed by the attack |
| 10 | Unknown                  | Adult male   | Idlib, Ar-Rami village  | 7 October | Killed by the attack               |

### The names of the injured:

1. Ahmad Abboud al-Matar
2. Ai Abboud al-Matar
3. Khalid Ahmad al-Abdo
4. Muhammad Jamil al-Assaf
5. Ibrahim Husam al-Izzo
6. Amer al-Assaf

The eyewitness said the attack is believed to be a response to the huge loss of morale suffered by regime forces following battles in Atshan, after losing over 20 tanks in clashes with armed oppositions groups and FSA units.

Media activist Basil Abu al-Yman published a [video](#) of the targeted area.

## 5- Attacks of 8 October 2015

### A- The Shelling of Khan Shaykhun City, Idlib Countryside

On 8 October, [an air](#) raid targeted the family home of VDC field researcher Ibrahim al-Mawwas, aka Abu al-Ghayth al-Khani, in Khan Shaykhun, immediately killing his mother, Loyal al-Asaad.

"On Thursday, 8 October, at 2:30 pm, Russian warplanes shelled a civilian residential neighborhood in the city with four thermobaric missiles," al-Mawwas reported, adding: "one of them hit my family's house, where my mother was instantly killed. Another young man was also killed, while 15 others were injured, most of them children, three of them critically, in addition to the severe destruction of houses and nearby buildings. The house is located north-west of the city in the Wadi al-Ayn neighborhood. When the missile struck the house, my father, two sisters and nephew were inside, in addition to Muhammd Ahmd ar-Roru (19) a neighbor who was also killed in the shelling. My father, Hasan al-Mawwas, was severely injured and was transported to Turkey for treatment, while my two sisters, Amnah and Amni al-Mawwas, were also injured. There were no nearby military checkpoints or targets in the area."

A [video](#) shows locals lifting Loyal al-Assad's body from the rubble directly after the shelling. Another [video](#) by Abu al-Gayth shows the destruction of houses following the attack.

## 6- Attacks of 13 October 2015

### A- The Shelling of Darat Izza City, North-West of Aleppo city

On 13 October, [Russian warplanes](#) raided Darat Izza twice more. The first attack targeted civilian neighborhoods. When people hurried to the scene of the explosion, another missile struck the same location, immediately killing five people and injuring a number of others, according to media activist Rida Haj Bakri.

A [video](#) published by Civil Defense in Aleppo shows the destruction of several buildings in Darat Izza caused by the Russian airstrikes.

The names of the victims published by [Kinanah Hospital](#) in Darat Izza, and verified by VDC, are as follows:

|   | Full Name                      | Gender     | Governorate and Area           | Date       | Notes              |
|---|--------------------------------|------------|--------------------------------|------------|--------------------|
| 1 | Ahmad Zaqomo                   | Adult male | Aleppo countryside: Darat Izza | 13 October | Killed by shelling |
| 2 | Kamel Mastto                   | Adult male | Aleppo countryside: Darat Izza | 13 October | Killed by shelling |
| 3 | Muhammad Abdul Qadir Affashah  | Adult male | Aleppo countryside: Darat Izza | 13 October | Killed by shelling |
| 4 | Alaa Muhammad Nannah           | Adult male | Aleppo countryside: Darat Izza | 13 October | Killed by shelling |
| 5 | Ahmad Muhammad Tawfiq al-Jamal | Adult male | Aleppo countryside: Darat Izza | 13 October | Killed by shelling |



## B- The Shelling of Hayyan Town in Northern Aleppo Countryside

On 8 October, [an air](#) raid targeted the family home of VDC field researcher Ibrahim al-Mawwas, aka Abu al-Ghayth al-Khani, in Khan Shaykhun, immediately killing his mother, Loyal al-Asaad.

“On Thursday, 8 October, at 2:30 pm, Russian warplanes shelled a civilian residential neighborhood in the city with four thermobaric missiles,” al-Mawwas reported, adding: “one of them hit my family’s house, where my mother was instantly killed. Another young man was also killed, while 15 others were injured, most of them children, three of them critically, in addition to the severe destruction of houses and nearby buildings. The house is located north-west of the city in the Wadi al-Ayn neighborhood. When the missile struck the house, my father, two sisters and nephew were inside, in addition to Muhammd Ahmd ar-Roru (19) a neighbor who was also killed in the shelling. My father, Hasan al-Mawwas, was severely injured and was transported to Turkey for treatment, while my two sisters, Amnah and Am-ani al-Mawwas, were also injured. There were no nearby military checkpoints or targets in the area.”

A [video](#) shows locals lifting Loyal al-Assad’s body from the rubble directly after the shelling. Another [video](#) by Abu al-Gayth shows the destruction of houses following the attack.



An injured man trapped following the attack, 13 October. Source: Ahmad Abu an-Nour/Hayyan Media Office.



Remains of a house destroyed by the attack. Source: Civil Defense in Hayyan.



Victims' remains following the attack. Source: Civil Defense in Hayyan.

The following victims' names were provided by Ahmad Abu an-Nour and verified by VDC:

|   | Full Name                     | Gender       | Governorate and Area          | Date       | Notes  |
|---|-------------------------------|--------------|-------------------------------|------------|--|
| 1 | Muhammad Sabbouh Rustum       | Adult male   | Aleppo countryside:<br>Hayyan | 13 October | 55 years old   |
| 2 | Anas Muhammad Rustum          | Child male   | Aleppo countryside:<br>Hayyan | 13 October | 17 years old   |
| 3 | Mansour Muhammad Rustum       | Child male   | Aleppo countryside:<br>Hayyan | 13 October | 12 years old   |
| 4 | Muhammad Abdu Rustum          | Child male   | Aleppo countryside:<br>Hayyan | 13 October | 4 years old  |
| 5 | Rawiyah Muhammad Mansour Auso | Child female | Aleppo countryside:<br>Hayyan | 13 October | 17 years old   |
| 6 | Khadija Deibo Rustum          | Adult female | Aleppo countryside:<br>Hayyan | 13 October | 18 years old   |
| 7 | 3 missing                     | Adult male   | Aleppo countryside:<br>Hayyan | 13 October | Missing at the scene of the attack; activists claim their remains were not found |

A [video](#) published by Civil Defense in Aleppo shows the shattered remains of victims and the destruction of buildings and property following the shelling.

Another [video](#) published by Civil Defense in Hayyan shows workers and locals lifting victims from under the rubble of their houses.

## 7- Attacks on 15 October 2015

### A – The Bombing of al-Ghantu, Talbeesa, al-Rastan, al-Dar al-Kabera and Zafarana in Homs Countryside

On 15 October 2015, Russian warplanes targeted a shelter in the town of [Al-Ghantu](#) in the northern suburbs of Homs, resulting in the deaths of more than forty people, all of whom were civilians, according to VDC's local correspondent. Our center spoke with several locals and eyewitnesses, including Dr. Kanaan Abdul Mawla (45),<sup>10</sup> who arrived at the targeted area immediately after the attack. He stated the following:

"I work in a field hospital about 2 km away from the targeted location. On 15 October 2015, at about 1:00 pm – following clashes that erupted on the western and southern fronts over 2 km away – the town was exposed to fierce shelling. We informed observatories that Russian warplanes were flying above the town. A few minutes later, we saw a black column of smoke in the location that had been targeted by several missiles. Accompanied by a friend, I travelled to the targeted area to see that a shelter owned by the Assaf family had been completely destroyed, even though it was one of the more secure shelters; concrete walls more than 10 cm thick, a roof made of iron bars similar to railway tracks, and a depth of five meters. Furthermore, the shelter was covered with three meters of soil.

"Upon arriving at the location, I immediately saw 11 charred bodies and the area had turned into a three meter-deep hole; with the destruction reaching to nearby houses. The remaining bodies were scattered in pieces; we continued collecting body parts and pieces of burned flesh for three consecutive days. The final victim tally was more than forty civilians."

The doctor confirmed that the targeted location was a civilian area and that there was no nearby military presence. He added that all of victims were from the Assaf family, and were relatives of an FSA commander named Abu Abba. The FSA commander was not in – or near – the location at the time of the attack.

Our center has documented the names of [44 civilians](#) killed in the massacre, including [11 male children](#), [11 female children](#), [11 women](#).

## 8- Attacks of 21 October 2015

### A – The Bombing of Rasim al-Hamam and Abu Khanadiq Village in Hama Suburbs

Regarding the shelling of Rasim al-Hamam and Abu Khanadiq, media activist Abu Shadi al-Hamwi from Hama suburbs told VDC:

"On 21 October 2015, Russian warplanes targeted the villages of Rasim al-Hamam and Abu Khanadiq with five missiles. The shelling targeted a school full of displaced people in the village of Rasim al-Hamam, killing two civilians and injuring several others. The village contained no military headquarters for any armed faction ... At the same time, Abu Khanadiq village in Hama suburbs was targeted with another airstrike; similarly, the village contained no military presence. The attack killed seven civilians."

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10- Dr. Abdul Mawla has since informed VDC that he and the field hospital where he worked in Ghantu town was struck on 30 October 2015. Fortunately, he survived the shelling, which caused significant damage to the hospital that provides medical assistance for the injured. He added that the town was exposed to more than eight raids by the Russian aircrafts on that day.

**The names of the victims are documented as follows:**

|   | Full Name                           | Gender       | Governorate and Area   | Date       | Notes  |
|---|-------------------------------------|--------------|------------------------|------------|--|
| 1 | Najma Hussein al-Khaled             | Adult female | Hama: Abu Hureij       | 21 October | Killed in shelling of Abu Khanadiq Village (displaced) |
| 2 | Abdulhai Ahmad Abdulkader al-Dandan | Adult male   | Hama: Abu Hureij       | 21 October | Killed in shelling of Abu Khanadiq Village (displaced) |
| 3 | Faten Ahmad Abdulkader al-Dandan    | Adult female | Hama: Abu Hureij       | 21 October | Killed in shelling of Abu Khanadiq Village (displaced) |
| 4 | Tamadur \ Abdulkader al-Dandan      | Adult female | Hama: Abu Hureij       | 21 October | Killed in shelling of Abu Khanadiq Village (displaced) |
| 5 | Rodwan Rajab al-Haji                | Adult male   | Hama: Hama countryside | 21 October | Killed in shelling of Abu Khanadiq Village (displaced) |
| 6 | Unidentified (1)                    | Adult male   | Hama: Hama countryside | 21 October | Killed in shelling of Abu Khanadiq Village (displaced) |
| 7 | Unidentified (2)                    | Adult male   | Hama: Hama countryside | 21 October | Killed in shelling of Abu Khanadiq Village (displaced) |

Activist Abu Shadi al-Hamwi provided the center with exclusive photos to VDC of the targeted area:



School targeted by Russian warplanes in Rasim al-Hamam, 21 October 2015.  
Source: Abu Shadi al-Hamwi





The ruins of house in the village of Abu Khanadiq, Hama suburbs, 21 October 2015.  
Source: Abu Shadi al-Hamwi.



Ruins of house in the village of Abu Khanadiq, Hama suburbs, 21 October 2015.  
Source: Abu Shadi al-Hamwi.

## 9- Attacks of 22 October 2015 (Cluster Munitions)

### A - The bombing of Hayyan Town in Aleppo Using Cluster Munitions

On the night of 21 October and the morning of 22 of October 2015, fighter jets launched several airstrikes near [Hayyan town](#) (north of Hayyan towards the center of Bayanoun) in Aleppo's northern suburbs using four rockets equipped with cluster munitions. Each rocket contained 36 smaller cluster munitions (144 in total) according to witness testimonies and Syrian Civil Defense members, who spoke directly to VDC. Eyewitnesses provided our center with a number of photos and videos that demonstrate the use of cluster munitions. The targeted area was empty land, in exception for a few scattered houses. The attack pierced the roofs of some houses, injuring one person, in addition to killing many livestock. When rockets struck the area around 12:30 am, just after midnight, all munitions exploded except for five bombs, found still attached to their parachutes.

The use of the cluster munitions was also confirmed by activist Abu Nour Ahmed, who was present in the town of Hayyan at the time of the attack. According to Abu Nour Ahmed, the explosion caused damage to a number of civilian houses. He said he had never witnessed the use of this specific munition before.

The Civil Defense office in Hayyan posted a [video](#) on 23 October 2015, showing a member dismantling a number of unexploded cluster munitions.



A Syrian Civil Defense member attempting to dismantle one of the five unexploded munitions.  
Source: Civil Defense in Hayyan.



Members of Syrian Civil Defense moving an unexploded cluster missile.





Cluster munitions dismantled by the Syrian Civil Defense teams.  
Photo: Civil Defense in Hayyan.



Damage caused to a home by missiles loaded with cluster munitions.  
Source: Civil Defense in Hayyan



Damage caused to a home by missiles loaded with cluster munitions.  
Source: Civil Defense in Hayyan

Russia's defense ministry [acknowledged](#) on 22 October 2015, at 16:23 GMT, Russian air forces conducted 53 sorties in Syria, attacking 72 'terrorist' targets within the previous 24 hours.

In a [statement](#) to RT Arabic channel, Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov said the Russian airstrikes were carried out by Su-34, Su-24 and Su-25 SM warplanes, targeting the suburbs of Hama, Idlib, Latakia, Damascus, Aleppo and Deir Ezzor.

VDC has been unable to verify if any other sorties were conducted during the time of the attack, whether by Syrian government or US-led international coalition aircrafts.

## 10- Attacks of 23 October 2015

### A – The Shelling of a Vegetable Market in Killi Town, Idlib

On 23 October 2015, our center was informed that warplanes had targeted a [crowded market](#) in the town of Killi, Idlib suburbs. Following the strike, our local correspondent spoke with eyewitness Qutaiba Abu Najm, who stated:

"At about 4:00 pm, and according to the announcement of our observatories, Russian warplanes targeted the main street in Killi, which connects to the town's main market, using a vacuum missile, instantly resulting in massive destructing to surrounding shops, including the collapse of three civilian houses, despite no military headquarters or armed groups having a presence in the town. In addition to killing four civilians, three of them from the Abilo family as the rocket fell beside their house, the shelling also injured several others on the spot."

|   | Full Name                   | Gender       | Governorate and Area | Date       | Notes                     |
|---|-----------------------------|--------------|----------------------|------------|---------------------------|
| 1 | Saleh Raafat Abilo          | Child male   | Idlib: Killi village | 23 October | Killed by Russian attacks |
| 2 | Abdullah Raafat Abilo       | Child male   | Idlib: Killi village | 23 October | Killed by Russian attacks |
| 3 | Sedra Raafat Abilo          | Child female | Idlib: Killi village | 23 October | Killed by Russian attacks |
| 4 | Alaa Ahmad Ammar al-Youssef | Child female | Idlib: Killi village | 23 October | Killed by Russian attacks |



Abdullah Raafat Abilo  
Source: Qutaiba Abu al-Najem



Saleh Raafat Abilo  
Source: Qutaiba Abu al-Najem



Some of those recorded as critically injured were:

1. Rahma Abdulkareem Ismael
2. Lina Akrima Alolo
3. Majed Abdulkareem Zalat
4. Ismael Hussein Meriee.

More than a dozen others sustained minor injuries.



"A destroyed house in Killi village following the Russian airstrikes."  
Source: Qutaiba Abu Najem

## 11- Attacks of 24 October 2015

### A - The Shelling of Hayyan Town in Aleppo Suburbs Using Cluster Munitions

On 24 October 2015, at about 8:00 pm local time, warplanes launched a raid on the east of Hayyan town, shelling several houses, in addition to a farm inhabited by displaced people from the northern countryside of Aleppo. The attack left one person dead while another lost their leg, wounding more than a dozen others. From the three airstrikes, at least 150 cluster munitions exploded on impact, according to locals and the Civil Defense office in Hayyan. After reviewing a number of pictures of the munitions used in the attack, VDC has concluded that they differ from those used in previous strikes. Manager of Hayyan Media Office Abu Nour Ahmad told to VDC:

"The attack came in two stages; the first targeted the location, which was a house, so people and several cars rushed to the scene to attend to the injured, while the second attack targeted the cars that carried the wounded."



Remains of cluster munitions. Source: Civil Defense in Hayyan



A Civil Defense member stands beside the cluster munitions to compare its size.  
Source: Civil Defense in Hayyan



Cluster munitions. Source: Civil Defense in Hayyan



Hussein Adel Ouso was killed in the cluster munition attack on Hayyan, Aleppo, 24 October 2015.  
Source: Civil Defense in Hayyan

## 12- Attacks of 25 October 2015

### A - The Shelling of Sheikh Baraka Village in Idlib Suburbs

On Sunday, 25 October 2015, Russian warplanes targeted Sheikh Baraka village in Maaret Noaman, Idlib, with two successive airstrikes, killing and [injuring](#) several civilians as well as destroying a number of houses.

**VDC field researcher Ibrahim Mawas -Abu Ghaith al-Khani- interviewed several eyewitnesses, later informing us of the following:**

“I have met with the chairman of the Local Council in the village, Mr. Wasel Diab, who confirmed that minutes before the attack, six Russian warplanes were seen flying above the village that afternoon. They then returned in the same evening at about 8:06 pm to shell the village, at which point Mr. Wasel rushed with other residents to the targeted area. The observatories, however, told locals that Russian warplanes were intending to target the village again at about 8:15 pm. Soon after, the Russian warplanes launched new airstrike near the site of the first explosion, which was essentially a civilian area. Mr. Wasel added that the targeted area did not contain any military presence.”

Ibrahim Mawas provided the center with the names of four people who were killed in the attack:

|   | Full Name                  | Gender       | Governorate and Area  | Date       | Notes   |
|---|----------------------------|--------------|-----------------------|------------|---|
| 1 | Fatima Khaled al-Huwaiyan  | Adult female | Idlib: Shiekh Barakeh | 25 October | 28 years old  |
| 2 | Kamel Muhammad al-Muheimid | Child male   | Idlib: Shiekh Barakeh | 25 October | 6 years old   |
| 3 | Sajida Waleed al-Muheimid  | Child female | Idlib: Shiekh Barakeh | 25 October | 7 years old   |
| 4 | Sanaa Waleed al-Muheimid   | Child female | Idlib: Shiekh Barakeh | 25 October | 5 years; died from wounds two days after the attack |

## 13- Attacks of 26 October 2015

### A - The Shelling of Kafr Zita in Hama Suburbs

According to activist Aws Hassan, Russian warplanes shelled Kafr Zita city on 26 October 2015 at about 6:00 pm. The shelling targeted the specialized hospital in the city using two missiles from a very high altitude, injuring two of the medical staff. The activist added that observers can usually distinguish the Russian aircrafts from other warplanes based on several factors, including the presence of a scout plane prior to a strike, and the rotation patterns in the lead-up to the targeting of an area.

Activist Mohammed al-Hamwi [published a video](#) of one of the Russian airstrikes on Kafr Zita on 26 October 2015.



## 14- Attacks of 27 October 2015

### A -The Shelling of Hayyan in Aleppo's Northern Suburbs

On 27 October 2015, Russian warplanes launched several airstrikes on the town of Hayyan in Aleppo's northern suburbs. After investigating the incident, VDC's researchers have concluded it was likely the strike did not attempt to target any specific area, suggesting the four airstrikes were launched in an effort to spread fear among the local civilian population. The attack killed media activists Abu Nour- Joumaa Ahmed, who participated in the drafting of this report, after he testified on several attacks on Hayyan (two of which were cluster munition attacks). Abu Nour shot video footage of three consecutive airstrikes on that day, but was killed when a fourth rocket struck a nearby area. Activists at the scene managed to recover the video shot by Abu Nour in the lead-up to his death ([video link](#)).

#### **Speaking on the attacks of that day, media activist Majed Abdel Nour (30) from Hayyan town told VDC:**

"The Russian warplanes targeted the town with four missiles, with only a few minutes between each strike. The first missile fell on a normal civilian house, which was fortunately empty at the time. As for the second, it fell on a place near the center of Hayyan. The third missile fell on Hayyan mosque at 4:15 pm, leading to the injury of several civilians and the destruction of nearby houses. The fourth rocket landed on a house where, unfortunately, media activist [Jumah](#) (Abu Nour) [Ahmad](#) was only about ten meters away. He died after shortly after being admitted to a nearby hospital."

According to Majed Abdel Nour, the missiles were randomly launched on areas of the city no nearby military presence.



Mosque in Hayyan town levelled by the Russian attacks, 27 October 2015.  
Source: Majed Abdel Nour



## B - The Shelling of Um Mayyal in Hama Suburbs

On 27 October 2015, Russian warplanes shelled the village of Um Mayyal (al-Qadamsa) in Hamra Township, Hama eastern suburbs, around midnight. According to our local reporter from Hama suburbs who spoke with activists from the village, the targeted location was a civilian area with no nearby military presence. The shelling resulted in the deaths of the entire al-Hikary family; they are:

|   | Full Name                         | Gender       | Governorate and Area        | Date       | Notes   |
|---|-----------------------------------|--------------|-----------------------------|------------|---|
| 1 | Khaleef Shahoud al-Hakari         | Adult male   | Hama Countryside: Um Mayyal | 27 October | 60 years old; killed in Russian attacks on the village                                |
| 2 | Shahoud Khaleef Shahoud al-Hakari | Adult male   | Hama Countryside: Um Mayyal | 27 October | 30 years old; killed in Russian attacks on the village                                |
| 3 | Fatima Khaleef al-Hakari          | Adult female | Hama Countryside: Um Mayyal | 27 October | 27 years old; killed in Russian attacks on the village                                |
| 4 | Khaleef Shahoud al-Hakari's wife  | Adult female | Hama Countryside: Um Mayyal | 27 October | 52 years old (mother of Shahoud and Fatima); killed in Russian attacks on the village |

## 15- Attacks of 28 October 2015

### A – The Shelling of Kansafra (Jabal al-Zawiya) in Idlib Suburbs Using Cluster Munitions

At around 7:00 pm, [Russian warplanes](#) launched two airstrikes on [Kansafra](#) using cluster munitions, according to media activist Abdulrazzaq al-Khalil (27), a local from Kansafra who was present during the shelling. In his testimony to VDC, Abdulrazzaq said:

“After the shelling, we heard the sound of a weak explosion – not like the usual explosions – and when we arrived at the targeted area, we were surprised to see the use of cluster munitions. There was no military target nearby. It appears the shelling was random as the targeted location was a civilian area. The shelling didn’t result in any destruction of property, injuries or casualties. This was also one of the rare instances that the shelling took place during rain, and the altitude of the warplane was too high. This was the first recorded incident of shelling during heavy rain since the beginning of the Russian airstrikes on Syria”

The activist provided VDC with two exclusive videos of the incident; the [first video](#) shows the first moments of the shelling on Kansafra, while the [second video](#) shows a number of unexploded cluster munitions following the strike.

**Abdulrazzaq also provided VDC with photos depicting the shape, size and type of the munitions used in the attack:**



(Photo 1-3) Source: Abdulrazzaq al-Khalil.

On the same day, the Russian Ministry of Defense [announced](#) that Su-25 warplanes carried out 71 sorties over Syria on 118 targets, claiming the airstrikes on Idlib Governorate<sup>11</sup> targeted a "disguised" major supply hub used by terrorists for storing weapons and ammunition.

## 16- Attacks of 29 October 2015

### A – The Shelling of al-Myaser Neighborhood in Aleppo Using Cluster Munitions

During the early hours of the morning, Russian warplanes [targeted al-Myaser neighborhood](#) in Aleppo using several [missiles loaded with cluster munitions](#). According to the head of Syrian Civil Defense in Bab al-Nairab, Bibers Meshaal (30), the attack took place around 1:30 am. Meshaal, who inspected the area following the attack, told VDC:

"After the Russian warplanes targeted al-Myaser, we travelled to the neighborhood to relieve the injured and the dead. Fortunately, there were no injuries, but after we left, people told us that they they had discovered strange objects scattered all over the neighborhood. We returned to find that dozens of cluster munitions had been deployed all over the streets and roofs of buildings, so we started collecting them."

**When asked whether there was any nearby military presence and how witnesses could identify the Russian warplanes, Bibers replied:**

"The targeted location was purely a residential and civilian area, and there was no nearby military presence; the targets were strictly civilian houses. We can distinguish Russian warplanes as they usually carry out several consecutive airstrikes – often five at a time, in addition to their sound, speed and by observatory warnings. Plus, Russian warplanes don't attack individually; they fly in groups. According to the observatories, some warplanes protect others while shelling the targets."



Remains of a missile that was found loaded with cluster munitions.  
Source: Bibers Meshaal (Syrian Civil Defense).

11-VDC cannot verify whether the attacks mentioned by Russia's defense ministry are the same attacks on Kansafra where cluster munitions were used. However, no other attacks, by Syrian forces or the US-led international coalition, were reported to VDC by locals or activists in the area on that day.



Cluster munitions found in al-Myaser neighborhood.  
Source: Bibers Meshal (Syrian Civil Defense)

## B – The Shelling of Kafr Owaid Village in Idlib Suburbs

Later that day, Russian warplanes targeted Kafr Owaid in Idlib Suburbs using cluster munitions, according to local activists, who also published photos and video footage of the unexploded munitions.

### **Media activist and village resident Ibrahim Shamali (28), who was also present during attack, told VDC:**

“On Thursday, 29 October 2015, at about 9:00 am, Russian warplanes targeted our village with three unique missiles; the sounds of their explosions were different from usual. These missiles caused consecutive explosions that lasted for approximately ten seconds. The missiles fell on a district crowded with schools; including primary, intermediate and secondary schools, as the area was occupied by government buildings in the past. Surprisingly, the shelling was carried out despite the fact it was cloudy. We heard more than one thousand successive explosions over an area of 300 square meters. Apparently, each missile contained around 200 cluster munitions; one of the missiles did not completely explode, allowing us to extract some munitions (about 51) for inspection and controlled detonation. Dozens of munitions also fell in the school yard. Fortunately, the students were attending classes and no one was outside.”



Part of an unexploded missile casing.  
Source: Ibrahim Shamali





Partially-exploded missiles parts.  
Source: Ibrahim Shamali

**An exclusive photos for VDC illustrate the damage due to the attacks. Source: Ibrahim Shamali:**



Photo No (1)



Photo No (2)





The first civilian casualty resulting from the use of cluster munitions in Syria was a woman in the village of Kabani “Kabina” in Jabal al-Akrad, Latakia Suburbs, on 25 May 2015, in an attack by Syrian government forces. This case was followed by 102 recorded cluster munition attacks on 115 neighborhood, cities and areas in Syria by government forces until 29 September 2015. The VDC was able to document the deaths of 341 civilians, including 38 women and 148 children, as a result of this weapon since it was first used by Syrian forces until the final days of September 2015.

## 17- Attacks of 30 October 2015

### A – The Targeting of al-Kastin Village in Jisr al-Shughur Suburbs, Idlib Governorate

According to eyewitness testimonies, shortly before Friday prayers, Russian warplanes targeted al-Kastin village using several extremely-destructive vacuum missiles, destroying several residential buildings. According to local villagers, the shelling killed at least six civilians, some of them children. Activist and head of Jisr al-Shughur coordination Tariq Abdul Haq (30) provided VDC with the names of four civilians killed in the attack. He also mentioned that the targeted area did not contain any military presence and was comprised solely of civilian houses. Tariq added that in distinguishing between Syrian and Russian warplanes, locals depend on the appearance of aircrafts and the power of their missiles, as Russian missiles are significantly more destructive, adding that Russian warplanes usually fly at higher altitudes and attack in groups.

|   | Full Name             | Gender       | Governorate and Area                   | Date       | Notes  |
|---|-----------------------|--------------|--|------------|--|
| 1 | Rana Rami Idrees      | Child female | Idlib: Jisr Shughur, al-Kastin Village | 30 October | Killed in the Russian attacks                                  |
| 2 | Mahmoud Zuheir Idrees | Child male   | Idlib: Jisr Shughur, al-Kastin Village | 30 October | Killed in the Russian attacks                                  |
| 3 | Mustafa Khadoua       | Adult male   | Idlib: Jisr Shughur, al-Kastin Village | 30 October | killed by the Russian attacks on al-Kastin                     |
| 4 | Unidentified girl     | Child female | Idlib: Jisr Shughur, al-Kastin Village | 30 October | Child could not be identified due to severity of disfigurement |



Unidentified girl whose head was disfigured due to the Russian attacks, al-Kastin village, Idlib.  
Source: Local villagers/Tariq Abdul Haq.

## B- The Targeting of the Aleppo's Eastern Neighborhoods

On day 30 of its aerial campaign in Syria, the Russian Air Force committed several devastating massacres in the city of Aleppo. Because the strikes targeted densely populated neighborhoods, the attacks resulted in the death of dozens of civilians and caused injury to many others.

Head of Syrian Civil Defense Office in Bab al-Nairab Bibers Meshaal was present in the targeted areas at the time of the attacks. By virtue of his job, Bibers worked to evacuate casualties and dig out others trapped under the rubble. In his testimony of that day, Bibers told VDC:

"The first attack took place at about 2:15 pm, when a missile struck the Wadi al-Arayes district (Kallaseh Neighborhood); it is a civilian district and is far from the closest frontline by more than five kilometers. The destruction we witnessed was enormous and frightening, immediately killing 20 civilians and injuring 16 others, while also damaging and destroying more than 25 houses.

"The second attack occurred around 2:30 pm, 15 minutes after the first attack, when a missile fell near the School of Martyr Abulkader Shasho (elementary and middle school) in the Salah Eddin neighborhood. Five people were instantly killed and two buildings were damaged. There was no military target near the point of impact.

"The third and fourth attacks were on Firdous Neighborhood, a few minutes after the second attack. One of the missiles hit a four-storey building. About 50 seconds later, another missile hit close to where the first missile landed. They struck an area near a police station for the Aleppo Free Police; they are civil police, and do not engage in fighting on the frontlines. The attacks resulted in the death of 15 civilians.

"The fifth attack took place in the Karem al-Nozha neighborhood, two minutes after the fourth attack on Firdous Neighborhood. The missile also fell on a civilian residential district; five people were instantly killed, three were injured, and more than three buildings were damaged."

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12- VDC will publish another report, which will cover the attacks after 30 October 2015.

Bibers told our center that the squadron consisted of two warplanes; one responsible for launching all the strikes, while the second acted as protection for the first. He added that the destructive power of the missiles was enormous compared to the missiles regularly used by the Syrian regime in attacking the city.

Activist and Director of the Aleppo Media Center Nour Reslan told VDC that the attack resulted in more than 68 casualties, and is likely to increase due to the number of those severely injured. He added that observatory bodies of the armed opposition had informed locals when the warplanes took off from Humaymim Airbase in Latakia, targeting several locations on the frontlines. Moreover, the warplanes also targeted civilians in the neighborhoods of Salah Eddin, Firdous, Wadi al-Arayes, and al-Shahar.

**To view a list of the casualties, [click here](#). VDC were able to document killing of 61 civilians in that day.**



Huzaifa Dahman, a field hospital nurse in eastern Aleppo, told the VDC that at least 22 people were killed in the shelling on the neighborhood of al-Kallasa, adding that several people in need of amputations were admitted to the field hospital where he works. Huzaifa said:

“We immediately went to the shelled location after the attack. The victims were scattered on the ground and some of them were still stuck under the rubble. When I returned to the hospital, one of the villagers told us that his sister that he thought was dead had moved a little bit, so we examined her. She appeared to have sustained internal bleeding but her body did not contain any serious injuries. A similar case occurred with a family – a mother and her children (ages 3, 4, and 5); their bodies had simple wounds but they were suffering from internal bleeding due to the pressure of the explosion.”

Another surgeon at the same hospital told VDC that he performed three amputations and five open-abdominal operations for people with internal bleeding, which suggests the use of piezoelectricity bombs by Russian aircrafts more likely.



## 5: Mass Displacements as a Result of the Russian Strikes:

Due to the widespread nature of the attacks by Russian warplanes, thousands of civilians were forced to flee their homes, especially in areas that have faced heavy bombardment, such as the suburbs of Hama, Idlib, and the northern, western, and southern suburbs of Aleppo, as well as ISIS-controlled suburbs in the east.

Along with several other activists from Aleppo's suburbs, Ahmed Al-Ahmad worked on monitoring the displacement in several towns and cities that lie below the poverty line, namely Aleppo's southern and western suburbs, where the number of internally displaced people has reached nearly 100,000, he told the VDC.

"A large part of those who fled were displaced to the northern suburb of Aleppo, while many others fled to the northern suburbs of Idlib," Al-Ahmed said. "These people were reportedly displaced from Blas, Mirimin, Hadher, Tal Bajer, al-Eis, Banis, Sabqia, Wodehi, Khalsa, Zarba, Barqum, Hadhaba, Khan Toman, Hmera, Kafr Owaid, Shaghhdalia, Azizia and many other villages."

The VDC learned from sources at the Atma Camp for the displaced that at least 1,000 families have been displaced since the beginning of the Russian airstrikes until the end of October 2015.

## 6: Conclusion and a Legal Assessment:

Since the beginning of the Russian strikes on 30 September 2015 until 30 October 2015, the VDC was able to document the death of at least (329) civilians, including (88) children and (58) women. However, the number of casualties increased <sup>12</sup>to (526) by the end of 15 October 2015, including (137) children and (71) women.

The International Committee of the Red Cross ("ICRC") has been describing the situation in Syria as an armed conflict of non-international character at least since July 2012 (Syria: [ICRC and Syrian Arab Red Crescent maintain aid effort amid increased fighting, Operational Update \(July 17, 2012\)](#)). This qualification has not been contested by the Syrian government or by any other international organization concerned by the situation in Syria.

Accordingly, international law rules are fully applicable in particular international human rights law and the relevant rules of international humanitarian law.

In particular, article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions (1949), ratified by Syria on November 2, 1953, is applicable in all Syrian territories and on all actors of the conflict. The Russian Federation is also a party to the four Geneva Conventions and to their Additional Protocols. Article 3 states in its relevant parts:

"In the case of armed conflict not of an international character occurring in the territory of one of the High Contracting Parties, each Party to the conflict shall be bound to apply, as a minimum, the following provisions:

(1) Persons taking no active part in the hostilities, including members of armed forces who have laid down their arms and those placed 'hors de combat' by sickness, wounds, detention, or any other cause, shall in all circumstances be treated humanely, without any adverse distinction founded on race, colour, religion or faith, sex, birth or wealth, or any other similar criteria. [...]."

At the same time, and as the military situation in Syria has become more complex notably with the intervention of many countries including, most recently the US led coalition, the Russian federation, both overtly and covertly, the legal nature of the conflict has evolved. The existence of an international element, and the ability of states other than the Syrian government to project power over the whole of the Syrian territory, effectively means that state parties to the 1949 four Geneva conventions involved in this armed conflict are bound by the entirety of the conventions. In addition, the Russian Federation has ratified the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects (1342 U.N.T.S. 137, 10 October 1980), including its Protocol III on the Prohibitions and Restrictions on the Use of Incendiary Weapons.

Finally, all parties to the conflict are bound by customary rules of international humanitarian law applicable on armed conflicts of both international and non-international character.

## **Distinction**

The principle according to which: “parties to the conflict must at all times distinguish between civilians and combatants. Attacks may only be directed against combatants. Attacks must not be directed against civilians,” is the cornerstone of customary international humanitarian law. It is also embedded in Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions (1949), and is thus applicable in non-international armed conflicts (ICRC 2005, Customary international humanitarian law, vol. 1, Henckaerts, J.-M., Doswald-Beck, L., & Alvermann, C. eds. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, at p. 3 (Rule 1)).

In addition, parties to all types of armed conflicts are prohibited in international humanitarian law from targeting civilian objects. (Id., at p. 25 (Rule 7)). Many international treaties, military manuals, relevant case law, and consistent state practice converge in defining civilian objects negatively, as those “which by their nature, location, purpose or use [do not] make effective contribution to military action.” (Id., at p. 29 (Rule 8)).

The practice of states consistently confirmed this principle and provided some specifications of objects and places that were considered civilian. For instance, the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2675 (XXV), has specified that “dwellings and other installations that are used only by civilian populations,” and “places or areas designated for the sole protection of civilians such as hospital zones or similar refuges,” should not be the object of military operations (Resolution 2675 (XXV), Basic Principles for the Protection of Civilian Populations in Armed Conflicts (December 9 1970), UN, General Assembly. Retrieved October, 2013, from <http://www.un.org/documents/resga.htm>). This resolution was adopted by an overwhelming majority of states with a summary vote of 109 affirmative, 8 abstentions and no against votes. (United Nations, General Assembly, Official Records, 25th Session: 1922nd Plenary Meeting (Wednesday, December 9, 1970), UN Doc. A/P.V. 1922 (1970), at p. 12.) The ICRC restatement of customary international humanitarian law cited consistent state practice treating as prima facie civilian objects in all types of conflicts “cities, villages, residential areas, dwellings, buildings and houses and schools, civilian means of transportation, hospitals, medical establishments and medical units, historic monuments, places of worship and cultural property.” (ICRC 2005, Customary international humanitarian law, at p. 34 (footnotes omitted)).

The prohibition on targeting civilian populations and objects in armed conflicts has implications on the way the parties to an armed conflict can conduct the hostilities and the types of weapons they can use. In particular, indiscriminate attacks are prohibited in all types of conflicts.

Rule 12 of the ICRC restatement of customary international humanitarian law provides the following definition for indiscriminate attacks supported by consistent practice:

**Indiscriminate attacks are those:**

- (a) which are not directed at a specific military objective;
  - (b) which employ a method or means of combat which cannot be directed at a specific military objective; or
  - (c) which employ a method or means of combat the effects of which cannot be limited as required by international humanitarian law;
- and consequently, in each such case, are of a nature to strike military objectives and civilians or civilian objects without distinction." (Id., at p. 40).

## Targeting of Civilians

This report has documented air raids executed over cities, towns and villages in Syria during the month of October 2015. The report provides strong, but definitive, evidence to support a conclusion that these raids are attributable to the Service of the Air force of the army of the Russian Federation ("RFAF"). All the targeted areas in all the attacks appear by nature, location and purpose civilian from the perspective of the applicable international humanitarian law.

More specifically, all of the attacks reviewed targeted densely populated dwellings in urban neighborhood and villages. There is frequent targeting of:

- residential buildings (e.g., the attack on the village of ma'şarān/idleb on October 7th, 2015; the attack on khan sheikhūn/idleb on October 8, 2015; the attack on the town of ḥayyān/ rīf ḥalab on October 13th and 24th 2015; the attack on the village of oum mayyal/ḥamah on October 27, 2015; the attack on kişanfarah/Idleb on October 28, 2015; the attack on the neighborhood of al mayser, in the city of Aleppo on October 29th, 2015; the attack on the village of al kastan in jisir el shoghūr/idleb on October 30th, 2015; the attack on wadi al a'rīs one of eastern Aleppo neighborhoods on October 30th, 2015; the attack on al fardos neighborhood in Aleppo on October 30th, 2015; the attack on karn el nizhah neighborhood in Aleppo on October 30th, 2015)
- schools (e.g., attack on the villages of rasm al ḥamām/ ḥamah on October 21th, 2015; the attack on the village of kafr u'ued/ Idleb on October 29th, 2015; the attack on ṣalah el din neighborhood of Aleppo on October 30th, 2015)
- places of worship (e.g., the attack on omar bin al khṭāb mosque in the town of jisir el shoghūr/idleb on October 1st, 2015; the attack on the town of ḥayyān/ rīf ḥalab on October 27, 2015)
- other places used as shelters for civilians (e.g., attack on the town of ihsem/idleb on October 3rd, 2015; attack on the town of al ghanṭo/country side north of ḥoms on October 15, 2015; the attack on the village of rasm al ḥamām/ ḥamah on October 21th, 2015; the attack on the town of ḥayyān/ rīf ḥalab on October 24th, 2015)
- markets (e.g., the attack on the vegetables market in the town of killi/Idleb on October 23rd, 2015);



More seriously, the report also documents attacks on hospitals (the attack on the town of kafr zitah/ ḥamah on October 26th, 2015) in direct violation of article 18 of the Fourth Geneva Convention which stipulates that: “Civilian hospitals organized to give care to the wounded and sick, the infirm and maternity cases, may in no circumstances be the object of attack, but shall at all times be respected and protected by the Parties to the conflict” (emphasis added).

The attacks reviewed appear to form a pattern of attacking civilian places and populations. The consistency with which civilian places have been targeted makes it more likely that the RFAF was not directing the attack on any specific military objective.

## **Types of Weapons**

In addition to the pattern of targeting civilians and civilian places the report brings disturbing evidence of the use of particular types of weapons that may be deemed to be excessively injurious or to have indiscriminate effects:

### **Thermobaric (Fuel-air or Vacuum Munitions)**

Many of the testimonies included in the report made a reference to a potential use of thermobaric weapons. However, the VDC was not able to independently verify that the weapons used in these attacks were indeed thermobaric (fuel-air or vacuum) weapons. At the same time, the use of such weapons by the Russian army on residential areas has been documented in the past in the context of the war in Chechnya (see Backgrounder on Russian Fuel Air Explosives (“Vacuum Bombs”), Human Rights Watch, February 1, 2000. from <https://www.hrw.org/report/2000/02/01/backgrounder-russian-fuel-air-explosives-vacuum-bombs> ).

Although the use of thermobaric weapons in general is not prohibited in international humanitarian law, their in urban settings and on civilian targets, in particular given their enhanced explosive capabilities make them inherently indiscriminate. Accordingly, their use in the particular cases documented in this report would constitute a violation of customary rule of international humanitarian law (see Rule 12 of the ICRC restatement).

### **Cluster Bombs**

The testimonies included in this report made a reference to the use of cluster bombs supported by images of unexploded bomblets. The use of cluster bombs during the same period reviewed in this report was also documented by other human rights organizations (see Syria: New Russian-Made Cluster Munition Reported, Human Rights Watch, October 10, 2015. from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/10/10/syria-new-russian-made-cluster-munition-reported> )

The Russian Federation is not party to the Convention on Cluster Munitions (Oslo: December 3rd, 2008). However, its use of cluster bombs in general in Syria, and in particular when targeting civilians and civilian places is a clear violation of customary rules of international humanitarian law. In particular, it is a violation of customary IHL because these weapons are indiscriminate in all context and its use on residential neighborhoods and other civilian places constitute an indiscriminate attack.

## War Crimes

According to customary international humanitarian law, indiscriminate attacks on civilians are serious violations of international humanitarian law. (ICRC 2005, Customary international humanitarian law, vol. 1, Henckaerts, J.-M., Doswald-Beck, L., & Alvermann, C. eds. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, at p. 599). They accordingly constitute war crimes. (Id., at p. 568 (Rule 156)).

Under customary international humanitarian law, war crimes committed in any type of conflict engage the individual criminal responsibility of the commanders who gave the orders for such attacks, as well as anyone who has committed or facilitated the attacks that qualifies as war crime, and anyone who has assisted, or has aided and abated them.



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