

Deir Ezzor Situation Report:

Civilians in the province of Deir Ezzor

May 31, 2017

In the past few weeks the province of Deir Ezzor has witnessed serious developments which have had a negative effect on civilians living in the province. This report provides a brief update on the situation of the armed forces controlling the province, as well as the humanitarian situation. In addition, it includes recommendations that would alleviate the suffering of civilians.

1- Areas of control

- ISIS controls more than 90% of the province and has imposed a suffocating siege on parts of the city since the beginning of 2015.
- The regime and its supporting militias control the neighborhoods of al-Joura, al-Qusour and Masaken Ayyash, which are located west of the city. They also control Hrabesh neighborhood, which is located in the east of the city, as well as military sites, most notably the airport which is located in the southeast of Deir Ezzor.
- The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) are located in the north, northwest, and northeast of the province.
- Opposition factions (Free Syrian Army) are present in the southeast of the province, in al-Badia.
- The Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) are located on the borders.

2- Field developments

The province of Deir Ezzor has witnessed military escalation during the last period from all sides of the conflict. Targeting infrastructure was carried out by the Russian and the Syrian air forces, as well as the international coalition, especially following the agreement on safe zones which stopped the fighting in many areas, leading to an escalation of military operations on the eastern fronts. This can be noted clearly after the Syrian regime and the militias began to move towards al-Sokhna at the same time that factions of the Free Syrian Army announced the start of the Syrian Badia battle, south of Deir Ezzor.

Since the beginning of 2017, after a major military campaign, ISIS has been able to isolate the areas which are controlled by the Syrian regime in the west and south of the city (Brigade 137, al-Jura neighborhood, al-Qusour and Masaken Ayyash) from the military airport and Hrabesh neighborhood in the east. It is believed that ISIS is trying to control these military sites in order to obtain supplies of weapons and equipment which are present in them.

3- Humanitarian situation

Due to recent field developments, the province of Deir Ezzor has witnessed a number of massacres:

- In the city of al-Bukamal, on April 19, 2017, Iraqi aircraft bombed civilian targets, killing 18 civilians.
- Several massacres took place in the city of al-Mayadin due to attacks by coalition aircraft which took place on May 25, 26, 27 and 28, 2017, killing 32 civilians.
- The Syrian regime has systematically and violently bombarded the neighborhoods outside its control. Aerial bombardments have been occurring almost daily for years. A massacre took place last week in the northern district of the city on the Euphrates River, which is under control of ISIS. There were many civilian casualties.

4- Living conditions

In the city of Deir Ezzor, the situation in al-Joura and al-Qazzour neighborhoods, which are under control of the Syrian regime, has been severely deteriorating as a result of the siege imposed on the population by ISIS since the beginning of 2015. On the other hand, prices have skyrocketed because the Syrian regime and its militias have looted humanitarian aid which was dropped by planes on these trapped areas.

In addition, al-Qusour neighborhood was targeted with mortars on a daily basis by ISIS. The neighborhood was targeted when civilians were trying to obtain water supplies on May 20, 2017. The attack resulted in an estimated seven civilian casualties, according to reports from inside of the city.

As for Hrabesh neighborhood, which is located east of the city and is adjacent to the airport, ISIS separated it from the rest of the neighborhoods which are under control of the Syrian

regime three months ago. This occurred after the military operation carried out by ISIS in the middle of February 2017. Following that, ISIS has imposed a severe siege on the neighborhood. People in the besieged area, estimated at 20,000, have come to the brink of starvation. They suffer from a major shortage of medicines, including first-aid medicines. It was reported that two people died from hunger in the past two weeks.

The areas under control of ISIS (especially the cities of al-Bukamal and al-Mayadin) are witnessing displacement of civilians due to daily bombardment by coalition aircraft. People hardly find a safe place to hide. Their journey is extremely difficult; the end is possible death due to mines planted by ISIS in al-Badia in the south, and in areas where clashes with SDF are taking place. The most important routes for civilians escaping from ISIS are:

- The road leading to the village of Zghir Jazeera, which lies 18 km west of the city of Deir Ezzor on the left bank of the Euphrates River. Then to the north, to al-Badia and Abu Khashab in a journey that lasts for hours during which civilians must be carried by smugglers on motorcycles. And then to the Ajajeh area and finally to SDF areas.
- Another road taken by civilians is from the village of al-Kasra, which lies 50 km west of Deir Ezzor. This journey is also carried out by smugglers.

5- Recommendations

- Civilians must be considered neutral from the conflict and thus not targeted by shelling in places classified as being under the control of terrorist organizations.
- Schools, medical points and asylum centers must be considered neutral from any military operations.
- Ensure the access of food and medicine to the people in the besieged areas in Deir Ezzor. It is important to take measures to ensure that the regime does not seize humanitarian aid.
- Secure safe roads and humanitarian corridors that lead to SDF areas so that civilians can leave ISIS areas. We would like to emphasize that it must be ensured that violations are not committed against them when they leave.
- Establish camps and shelters for the displaced in areas to be determined in line with existing forces.



- Regarding the proposal to establish a camp for the displaced in the area of Abu Khashab, in the desert of Deir Ezzor, it should be noted that there is a need to coordinate with the Syrian Democratic Forces in order to secure the camp and protect civilians.
- Make an assessment of the possibility of establishing a refugee camp in al-Jazrat area in particular due to its proximity, and because there are social links with the displaced.
- Make an assessment of the possibility of establishing a refugee camp in the Sabah al-Kher area.