

Peace Spring Strip Not as Safe as Turkey Publicizes



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“Peace Spring” Strip Not as Safe as Turkey Publicizes

Contrary to Turkey’s propaganda, armed chaos and insecurity have continued to characterize the situation in the two regions of Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tall Abyad, in which 33 internal fighting between factions of the opposition Syrian National Army (SNA) broke out during 2022 killing two civilians and injuring 20 others, among them two women and three children

Executive Summary:

During 2022, Hevesti-Synergy Association for Victims documented 33 intra-factional clashes/internal fighting, between factions of the opposition Syrian National Army (SNA) in the two regions of Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tall Abyad, that caused the death of two civilians and injured twenty others, including two women and three children. The internal fighting also killed 22 fighters of the Turkish-backed factions and injured at least 83.

Additionally in 2022, "Peace Spring" strip witnessed five cases of murder/assassination carried out by anonymous gunmen in which four fighters of the opposition SNA and two civilians were killed. One of the civilians was a jeweler who was killed during a robbery. Four fighters of the SNA's factions were injured during three failed murder/assassination incidents. Moreover, one single case of direct fire was documented when an armed group operating under the al-Hamzat/al-Hamza Division fired bullets on a gathering of civilians, injuring one boy.

The information collected by Hevesti-Synergy showed that there are several reasons behind the internal clashing between the SNA-affiliated factions. The majority of clashes are on disputes over power, drug dealing, and human trafficking between Syria and Turkey. Other clashes take place at first between individuals and, in some cases, evolve to become a wider military confrontation. Tribal fanaticism (*Asabiyya*) contributes to developing some of the disputes between fighters of the SNA into wider confrontations.

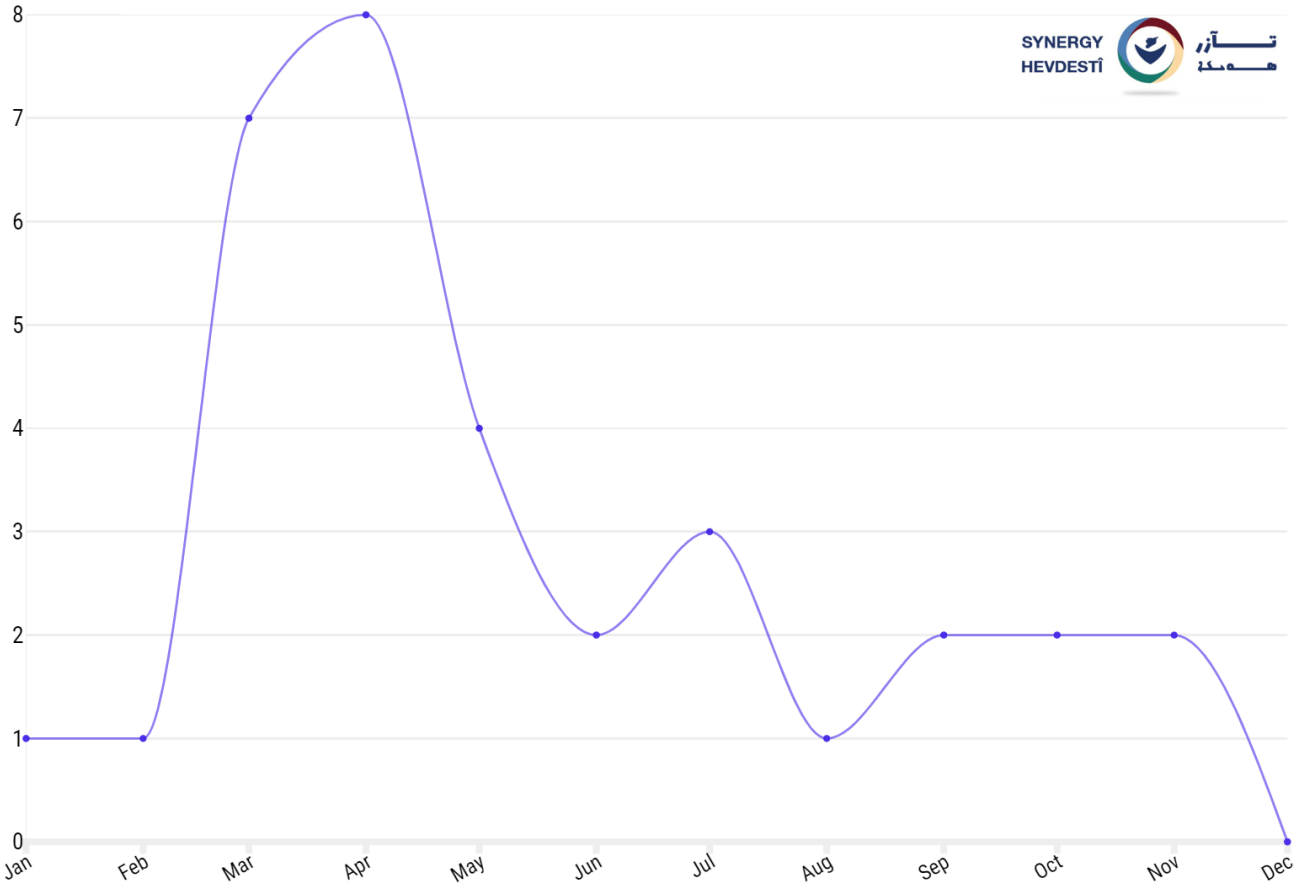
The biggest toll by intra-factional clashes between the SNA's factions in 2022 was felt in April, which coincided with the holy month of Ramadan, when eight internal clashes broke out. Seven clashes broke out in March and four in May, one of which was the most violent fighting in the Turkish-held areas in Northern Syria.

al-Hamzat Division is the group that was part of the most intra-factional clashes in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tall Abyad regions during 2022, as it was involved in 24 cases of internal fighting. Followed by Tajammu Ahrar al-Sharqiya/Gathering of Free Men of the East faction which took part in ten cases of internal infighting. While the 20th Division and the Military Police each took part in seven cases of internal fighting. The internal fighting did not break out, as expected, between two different armed factions only, rather eight internal clashes at least erupted between armed groups of the same faction.

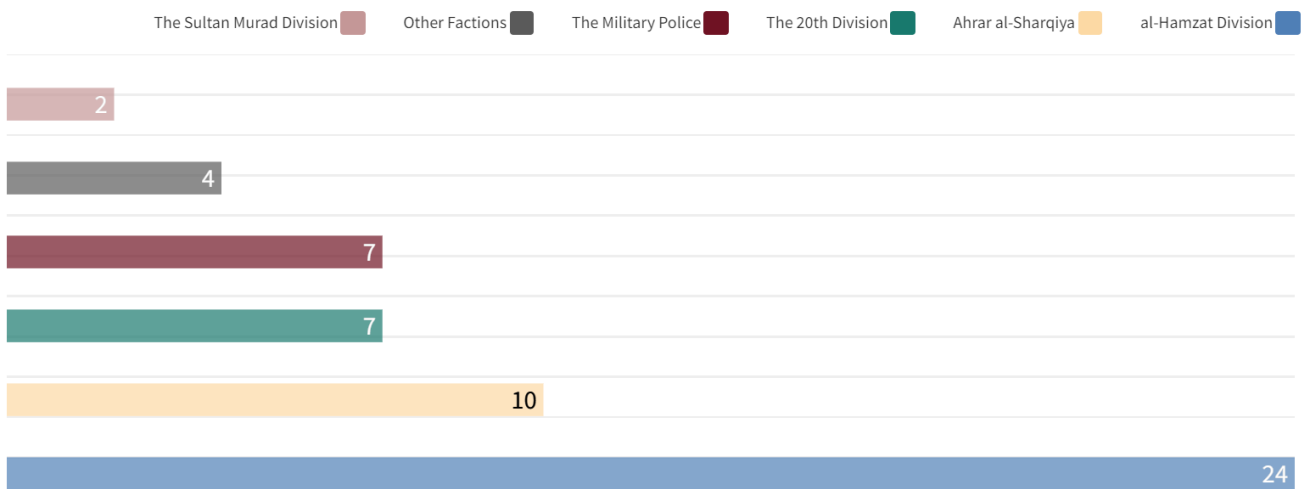
All the intra-factional fighting between factions of the SNA in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tall Abyad regions broke out in populated areas, such as markets, residential neighborhoods and villages. In some other cases, internal fighting broke out on checkpoints used by civilians. In addition, cases of killings, assassinations, and shootings were documented in the towns and villages.

From the victims' perspective, impacts of internal fighting and armed chaos in Turkish-held areas are not only limited to civilian casualties and civilian property damages. They rather

push the population to consider leaving the whole region. The deteriorating security situation increases the instability and clearly affects the economic development process, exacerbating the bad economic conditions and extreme poverty the majority of Syrians are already suffering from across the country.



Total toll of the internal fighting between factions of the Turkish-backed opposition Syrian National Army (SNA) in "Peace Spring" strip during 2022



The most prominent factions of opposition Syrian National Army (SNA) involved in internal fighting in "Peace Spring" Strip in 2022



Armed Chaos and Insecurity in “Peace Spring” Strip:

The Turkish government claimed its October 2019 military operation dubbed “Peace Spring” on Northeastern Syria as establishing a “safe zone” to protect its national security and bring peace and safety to the region. However, contrary to Turkey’s propaganda, armed chaos and insecurity have continued to characterize the situation in the two regions of Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tall Abyad despite three years have passed since Turkey’s occupation.

On the other hand, armed chaos and insecurity are rife in Turkish-held areas in Northern Syria, including Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tall Abyad, with no monitoring or license available. On April 12, 2022, the Ministry of Defense in the Syrian Interim Government (SIG), the political umbrella of the SNA, issued a [circular](#) to police the possession and use of arms in its areas of control and limit its use to military camps, front lines with the enemy, and security checkpoints¹. Nevertheless, the use of weapons is still rampant and any fight, frequently and immediately, turns to an armed confrontation whether by shooting in the air to spread fear and panic or direct shooting with the aim to cause injuries.

All of the above, the daily violations committed by factions affiliated with the Turkish-backed SNA, and lack of accountability and persistence of impunity, make the Turkish-held territories unsafe and not in meeting with the [criteria](#) of voluntary return set by the United Nations.

Turkey’s Legal Obligation as an Occupying Power:

Since October 2019, Turkey has occupied the area lying between Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tall Abyad under the operation called “Peace Spring” and maintains a continuous military existence there with enforcing Turkish law, running schools and other public jobs.

Territory is considered “occupied” when it comes under the effective control or authority of foreign armed forces, whether partially or entirely, without the consent of the domestic government. Today, an occupying power’s effective control can be exercised without a continuous military presence in the territory as the focus is on the extent of authority retained by the foreign focus rather than exclusively focusing on how it is exercised². As soon as the territory is under the effective control of foreign armed forces, laws of occupation apply.

Turkey deals with these regions as if they were a part of Turkey. For example, the two occupied cities of Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tall Abyad administratively, as well as in terms

¹ The Interim Government’s Ministry of Defense issued a [circular](#) on controlling the carrying of weapons within its areas of control, Enab Baladi, April 13, 2022. (Last accessed: July 25, 2022).

² ICRC Commentary on GCII (2017), § 331.

of services, follow Turkey’s governorate of Şanlıurfa. The Syrian Center for Support and Coordination, which is run by Şanlıurfa’s governor, provides public services, including water, garbage collection, city cleaning, health care services, and humanitarian assistance. Şanlıurfa’s former governor Abdullah Erin, and his successor Salih Ayhan visited the occupied region several times to check the implemented projects. Turkish state departments coordinate these services with the support and aid provided from the Turkish armed forces.³

On the other hand, the Turkish armed forces still control these territories and have established military bases⁴ and checkpoints there. The Turkish government provides training and logistical support to the SNA and police forces in the occupied area, and closely coordinates with them, at the highest levels, including instructing executive orders to senior commanders.

In the Turkish-occupied areas, Turkey bears responsibility to ensure public order and safety, and a special protection for women and children. Turkey remains bound by applicable human rights obligations vis-à-vis all individuals present in these territories. If Turkish forces do not intervene to stop those violations, when they are informed about, they may be violating the afore-mentioned obligations.

Furthermore, the occupying power is under obligation to respect the provisions of the human rights treaties to which the country whose territory is partially or totally occupied.⁵ Moreover, the extraterritorial application of human rights conventions is an obligation incumbent on the occupying power⁶.

In accordance with Article 43 of the 1907 Hague Regulations the occupying power “is under an obligation to take all the measures in its power to restore, and ensure, as far as possible, public order and safety in the occupied area.”⁷ Turkey is thus obliged “to secure respect for the applicable rules of the [IHRL] and [IHL], to protect the inhabitants of the occupied territory against acts of violence, and not to tolerate such violence by any third party”. Therefore, the occupier must also respect its own obligations derived from its own commitments to any international or regional conventions, in addition to any customary provisions. This was confirmed by the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR) which

³ Turkey’s AFAD, Şanlıurfa governorate distribute aid in northern Syria, DAILY SABAH, 27 Nov 2020.

⁴ Turkey restores water supply network for 35 Syrian villages, DAILY SABAH, 30 Dec 2020

⁵ UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), CCPR General Comment No. 26: Continuity of Obligations, 8 December 1997, CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.8/Rev.1. §4.

⁶ ICJ, Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Advisory Opinion, ICJ Reports 2004, p. 136, § 106.

⁷ ICJ, Armed Activities on the Territory of the Congo (Democratic Republic of the Congo v. Uganda), Judgment, 19 December 2005, ICJ Reports 2005, para. 178.

in turn stressed that the country part of the ECHR⁸ is obliged to apply the Convention outside its national territory, to the benefit of foreign nationals, whenever it is exercising control or authority over a foreign individual, and whenever it is exercising effective control over a territory other than its national territory.⁹

Violation of the US-Turkish Agreement:

Beside the failure to acknowledge its occupations of parts of Northeast Syria and not committing to its obligations as an occupying power in the areas lying between Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tall Abyad, armed chaos and insecurity in these areas indicate that Turkey is violating items of the US-Turkish Ceasefire in Northeast Syria [agreement](#), signed on 17 October 2022, and described a "Historic Agreement" by the US White House.

The agreement was announced by former US-Vice President Mike Pence and the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan after negotiations in Ankara. Soon after, former US president Donald Trump praised the agreement, adding "millions of lives will be saved". A joint US-Turkish statement following the negotiations said, "the Turkish armed forces will take over the creation of the safe area".

Item No. (4) in the joint US-Turkish statement, that included 13 items, stated, "**the two countries pledge to uphold human life, human rights and the protection of the religious and ethnic communities**". Also, item No. (7) of the agreement alleged, "**Turkey voiced commitment to ensure safety and well-being of residents of all population centers in the safe area controlled by the Turkish forces, and reiterated that it will take utmost precautions to avoid inflicting damage on civilians or on infrastructure.**"

Turkey failed, as an occupying power, to maintain the safety and security of the civilians living in the areas under its control. The numerous and continuous cases of intra-factional fighting between factions of the Turkish-backed SNA and proliferation and use of weapons among civilians all but ensure that the area lying between Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tall Abyad, which Turkey calls a "safe zone", is not safe at all, and that civilians' lives are at risk, contrary to item No. (7) of the US-Turkish agreement.

Not taking serious measures to maintain safety and security by the Turkish authorities effectively controlling these territories and turning a blind eye to the internal fighting among the armed factions tasked to administer the occupied region, violate Turkey's obligation to uphold human life and human rights, contrary to item No. (4) of the US-Turkish agreement. In addition to civilian casualties and material losses during these clashes, on more than one occasion, civilians were arrested by the warring factions on

⁸ Turkey has been a part of the ECHR since 18 May 1954.

⁹ ECtHR, Al-Skeini et al. v. the United Kingdom, Application no. 55721/07, Judgment (Grand Chamber), 7 July 2011, §§ 131-140.

charges of dealing with the enemy faction. Furthermore, civilians were forced to flee, fearing death during clashes, and were subjected to home and property pillage.

Recommendations:

Turkey has failed to assume its responsibilities vis-à-vis the territories it occupies in Syria and has not taken any serious measures to ensure the protection of civilians. Instead, it has turned a blind eye to the intra-factional fights between the armed factions which were authorized by Turkey to run the region. Although the Turkish authorities effectively control these areas, they never intervened to stop the clashing, except in one incident when they stopped the clashing, and it was coincided with the presence of Turkish officials in the region. Moreover, the Turkish authorities didn't hold accountable fighters of the factions who were responsible for killing or injuring civilians, and they never forced a faction to compensate the material damages caused by internal fighting.

Based on the above, Hevesti-Synergy Association recommends that:

- As an “occupying power”, the Turkish authorities must assume responsibility for ensuring public order and safety and providing special protection for women and children by taking all measures in its power to restore and ensure public order and safety in the occupied areas, as far as possible .
- The Turkish government must abide by the US-Turkish agreement, particularly the fourth and seventh articles which read that the two countries pledge to uphold human life, human rights, and the protection of the religious and ethnic communities, and to ensure safety and well-being of residents of all residential centers under the control of Turkish forces.
- As a power effectively leading the opposition SNA, the Turkish government must practice its utmost to safeguard the fundamental human rights in the areas it occupies by maintaining the law, holding its violators accountable, as well as protecting civilians from extortion, and security and military action.
- The Syrian Interim Government (SIG)/opposition, and primarily the Turkish government as an occupying power, must ensure the rights of all victims in the occupied areas to achieve justice by finding effective, clear, and accessible remedies ensuring justice's prompt and impartial achievement, hold accountable the perpetrators, and impose appropriate reparation procedures for the victims.
- Pursuant to rules of the International Humanitarian Law (IHL), the SNA's factions must avoid locating their headquarters and military sites inside cities or in the vicinity of civilians' work or residence places. Leaders of these factions bear legal liability and the Turkish authorities in turn, as an “occupying power”, assume responsibility to ensure commitment to these rules.

Background:

On 9 October 2019, the Turkish army started a military operation against northeast Syria. The Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan [announced](#) on Twitter the incursion of his country's forces alongside groups of the Syrian armed opposition/the SNA into northeast Syria under the so-called "Peace Spring" Operation following the withdrawal of the US/the Global Coalition and Ankara's acquisition of a *green light* to invade the region during a phone call between the Turkish president and former US president Donald Trump, on 6 October 2019.¹⁰

The Turkish assault has had dangerous repercussions on the population in the region, specifically the civilians. The invasion directly caused the [displacement](#) of more than 180,000 people from Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tall Abyad areas during the its first days, including thousands of women and children, in quick uncoordinated displacement waves, according to the United Nations.¹¹

On 17 October 2019, Turkey and the US signed an [agreement](#) to pause the Turkish military operations in northeast Syria for 120 hours, followed by the cessation of Peace Spring Operation after the Syrian Democratic Forces/SDF completed its withdrawal from the region.

As a result of Peace Spring Operation that ended on 22 October 2019, Turkey and factions affiliated with the Turkish-backed SNA controlled a strip of territory on the border that is 120 km long and 30 km wide between the areas of Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê, northwest al-Hasakah city, and Tall Abyad, northern Raqqa. The operation also led to the displacement of more than 175,000 people from the region, according to the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic.¹²

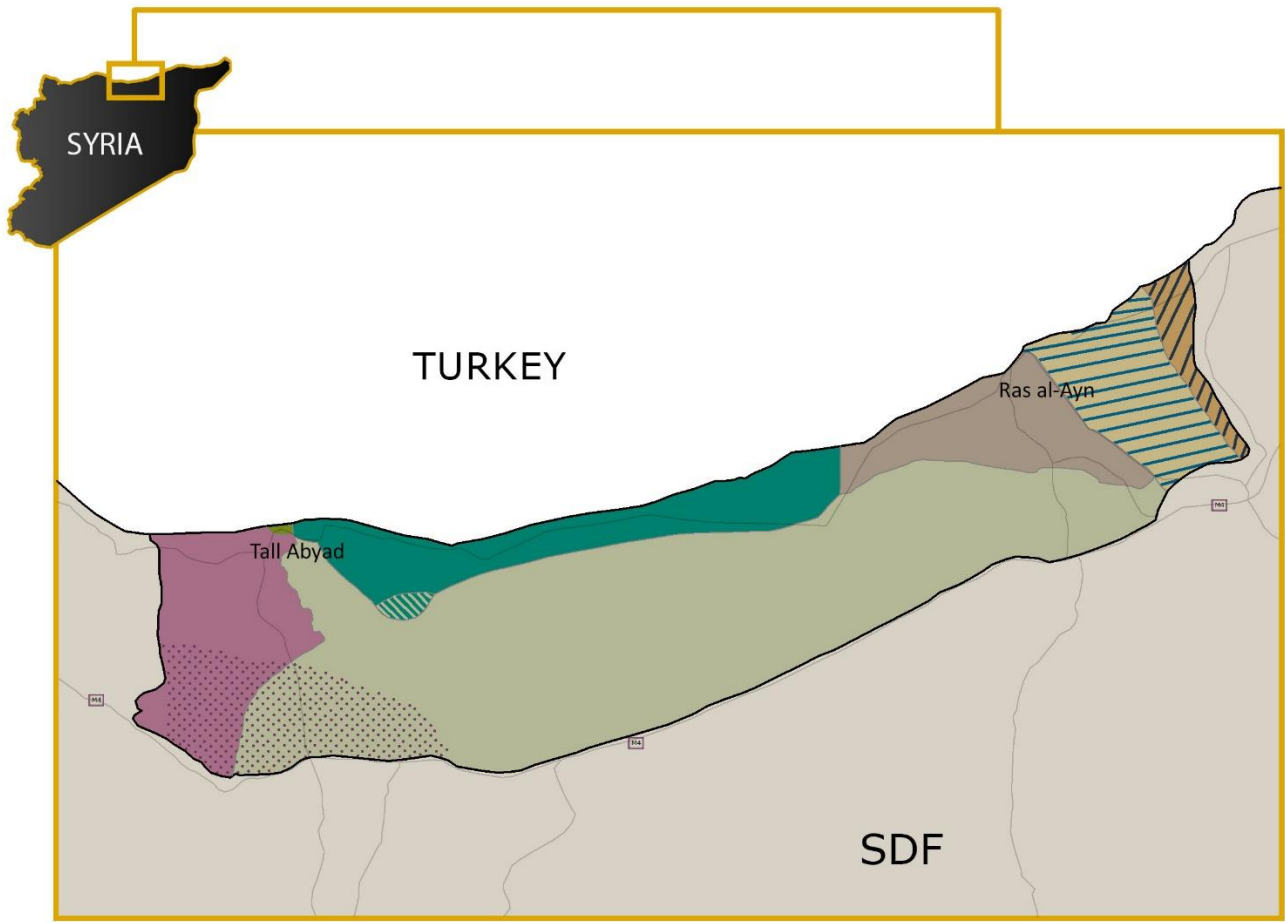
Following the end of Peace Spring Operation in the area lying between Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tall Abyad regions, factions of the SNA divided the territories among themselves. The Levant Front/al-Jabha al-Shamiya, The Glory Corps/Faylaq al-Majd, and Tajammu Ahrar al-Sharqiya/Free Men of the East took over Tall Abyad area while the Sultan Murad Division and al-Hamzat Division predominated in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê. Other armed groups, including Army of Islam/Jaysh al-Islam, Faylaq al-Rahman/al-Rahman Legion, the Northern Hawks Brigade, the Mu'tasim Division, and the 20th Division, were also stationed in the area in smaller numbers.











¹⁰ Amy Austin Holmes: Syrian Yezidis Under Four Regimes: Assad, Erdogan, ISIS and the YPG, The Wilson Center's Middle East Program, No. 37 | July 2020. P.12: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/syrian-yezidis-under-four-regimes-assad-erdogan-isis-and-ypg>.

¹¹ UNHCR: More than 10,000 Syrians crossed the Iraqi border since the onset of the Turkish campaign on Northeast Syria, the United Nations, 25 October 2019. (Last accessed on 25 July 2022).

¹² The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 28 January 2020, para 45, Document NO A/HRC/34/57.

The Opposition Syrian National Army's Areas OF Influence In Ras al-Ayn and Tall Abyad



-  al-Jabha al-Shamiya
-  Faylaq al-Majd
-  Ahrar al-Sharqiya
-  20rd Division
-  The al-Hamza/ al-Hamzat Division
-  The Sultan Murad Division
-  The Mutasim Division
-  Army of Isalm/ Jaysh al-Islam
-  The Northern Hawks Brigade
-  The Levant Front/ al-Jabha al-Shamiya, Faylaq al-Rahman, The Sham Legion/ Faylaq al-Sham

Despite reaching a US-Turkish “Ceasefire” agreement and a Turkish-Russian “Safe Area” agreement on 22 October 2019, yet the Turkish-backed armed factions have committed many violations against the population in the region, varying from extrajudicial execution to arbitrary arrest and torture, as well as home seizure and denial of return. Moreover, the armed factions looted and seized public buildings and properties in the areas, including the seizure of strategic grain storage, which part of it was sold to Turkey. [Hevdesti-Synergy](#) has published several reports documenting the violations committed by the armed groups in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tall Abyad regions.

Dozens of local and international parties have documented patterns of violations committed against residents in “Peace Spring” strip. Notably, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic that documented countless violations to human rights and International Humanitarian Law (IHL) committed by the SNA’s factions in a consistent pattern with what happened in Afrin in 2018.¹³

The Most Prominent Internal Fighting Cases in “Peace Spring” Strip During 2022:

Hevdesti-Synergy documented 33 intra-factional clashes/internal fighting between factions of the opposition SNA in the regions of Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tall Abyad that caused the death of two civilians and the injury of twenty others, including two women and three children. The internal fighting also killed 22 fighters of the Turkish-backed factions and injured at least 83.

Hevdesti-Synergy Association relied in its documentation process on the information collected in its database provided by a network of researchers scattered in the region, and on the accounts obtained from the victims, their families, and eyewitnesses. Furthermore, it verified the information from publicly available sources (open sources).

The Association notes that victims of the internal clashes between factions of the SNA in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tall Abyad regions might be more than what have been mentioned, as Hevdesti-Synergy only publishes the verified and documented cases.

- **Intra-Factional Fighting Over Smuggling Routes:**

On 9 January 2022, an internal fight broke out in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê city between fighters of al-Hamzat Division and the Military Police, which are affiliated with the opposition SNA. The fighting concentrated in al-Kana’es and al-’Abra streets, and in al-Mahta al-Shamali neighborhood, where machine guns were used.

¹³ Ibid.

The fighting lasted few hours, injuring one fighter of the al-Hamzat Division, according to the testimony of a woman from al-Mahta al-Shamali neighborhood in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê. She narrated to Hevesti-Synergy¹⁴:

“One fighter of al-Hamzat Division was shot in the foot. I knew about his injury because he lived in a house, which he had seized from a Kurdish family who fled following Peace Spring Operation, and I also live in the same street with my family. Days after his injury, his wife informed me that the fight had arisen as a result of dispute over stationing in a border point that is used for human trafficking and transporting people illegally to Turkey in exchange for money.”

- **Drug Dealing Causes an Internal Fight Between SNA Fighters:**

On 9 February 2022, another internal fight broke out between fighters of al-Hamzat Division and fighters of the Military Police on the one hand and between fighters of Sultan Murad Division and Tajammu Ahrar al-Sharqiya on the other hand in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê city.

A member of the Civil Police, a faction that was not a part of the internal fight and which attempted to subsidize it, told Hevesti-Synergy that clashes broke out because of internal disputes over drug dealing in the region.¹⁵ He continued saying:

“A patrol of the Military Police seized a few members of the Sultan Murad Division who were drugs dealers in partnership with other members of Tajammu Ahrar al-Sharqiya in al-Horana/Zorava neighborhood. When the Military Police attempted to arrest them, they fired at the patrol and injured one of the police officers who then retreated. After that, al-Hamzat Division intervened to support the Military Police given the clashes extended to the areas under its control near al-Kana’es street.”

The clashes lasted until late night, injuring one member of the Military Police and two fighters from the Sultan Murad Division.

- **Direct Shooting at Protesters, Including Women and Children:**

In March 2022, seven internal fights broke out between factions of the SNA, authorized by Turkey to run the area between Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tall Abyad (Peace Spring territory). The internal fighting caused the death of four fighters and injured 25 others.

In early March, an Iraqi national civilian was assassinated by two gunmen riding a motorcycle in the middle of Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê city. The security services of the SNA did not uncover identity of the killed person nor details of the crime. Hevesti-Synergy documented that at least 55 Iraqi families of the Islamic State (IS) militants’ families reside

¹⁴ The interview was conducted on 28 July 2022. Her name is withheld upon her request.

¹⁵ Leaders of factions the SNA are accused of being involved in drug dealing in Turkish-held areas in Northern Syria.

in houses, owned by forcibly displaced persons, and were seized in the two neighborhoods of al-Horana/Zorava and Zaradasht in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê city.¹⁶

On 14 March 2022, Ibrahim Ismael al-Khedr,¹⁷ 10, was injured when members of al-Hamzat Division fired live bullets on protesters in Tall Arqam village, west of Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê. The protesters demanded the end of lootings and property seizure.

The boy was severely injured and was transported to the hospital according to a member of his family¹⁸ who said that the villagers gathered to protest after fighters of al-Hamzat Division, operating under Hayat Thaeroon for Liberation, attempted to steal power cables from the village. The boy’s relative narrated:

“At the dawn of that day, fighters of “al-Hamzat” Division attempted to steal power cables from the village’s electricity transformer. But they fled away when they were discovered. Then, tens of villagers, including women and children, gathered in front of a military point of al-Hamzat Division, protesting their repeated looting and forcible appropriation of populations’ property. Fighters of the division directly fired live bullets on the protesters to disperse them, and Ibrahim was therefore injured.”

Ibrahim was transferred to the public hospital located in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê until he got well, according to the eyewitness.

¹⁶ On 2 June 2022, the [Turkish Humanitarian Relief Foundation \(IHH\)](#) had moved 139 Iraqi families from Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tall Abyad regions to Turkey in order to repatriate them to their own home country in coordination with the Iraqi consulate in Turkey’s Gaziantep city and the Iraqi Migrants and Expats Office based in Istanbul. 131 families out of them lived in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê city. That was the second time the IHH moves Iraqi families from Peace Spring territory into Turkey. In September 2021, the IHH moved 57 Iraqi families to Turkey. For more information, please visit: [A Turkish Organization Coordinates return of scores of Iraqi Families from Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and Tall Abyad, al-Khabour, 2 June 2022.](#) (Last accessed 18 July 2022).

¹⁷ [Facebook accounts](#) and local websites reported that the boy’s name was Mahmoud Ismael al-Khedr, but “Hevesti-Synergy” verified the name and details of the incident.

¹⁸ The interview was conducted on 15 March 2022. The witness’s personal information is withheld for security reasons.



Image No (01)- showing residents of Tall Arqam village in the west countryside of Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê, gathering around vehicles belonging to al-Hamzat Division on 14 March 2022, and protesting against the division’s fighters’ attempt to loot power cables from the village. Photo Credit: local activists

A week later, on 21 March 2022, Nadim al-Zawan, a fighter of al-Hamzat Division, was killed when members of Liwa Shuhada’a Badr, which is affiliated to al-Hamzat Division, fired bullets on a checkpoint run by the division in the village of [al-Aziziya](#) west of Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê as a result of an internal fight between the two groups.

A person from the village who witnessed the clashing told Hevesti-Synergy that there was a dispute over dividing power and royalty revenues collected from human trafficking and transporting people to Turkey¹⁹ illegally. He went on saying:

“Clashing broke out between two groups, one is commanded by Abu Hamid al-Harbi affiliated with al-Hamzat Division, and the other is commanded by Abu Iskander al-Deri affiliated with Liwa Shuhada’a Badr. The first group attempted to seize a checkpoint, run by the latter in the village, which imposes royalties on people wishing to cross to Turkey illegally as some armed groups of the SNA, specifically ‘al-Hamzat’ Division, the 20th Division, and Tajammu Ahrar al-Sharqiya, smuggle people to Turkey for money.”

¹⁹Al-Aziziya village on the border with Turkey is in the west of Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and has been a point for smuggling people into Turkey illegally since Turkey occupied the region in Operation Peace Spring in October 2019. The SNA-affiliated factions, in particularly al-Hamzat Division, the 20th Division, and Tajammu Ahrar al-Sharqiya, use the village to collect money by imposing royalties on the people wishing to cross illegally to Turkey. Besides, they use it to smuggle food stuff from and to areas under the control of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).



Image No (02)- showing the body of Nadim al-Zawan, a fighter of al-Hamzat Division, who was killed on 21 March 2022 as a result of internal fighting with Liwa Shuhada'a Badr in the village of al-Aziziya, west of Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê. photo credit: Local Facebook accounts

Al-Hamzat Division was a party in all the intra-factional fighting that broke out in “Peace Spring” territory over March 2022. The last internal clash was on 30 March in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê between al-Hamzat Division on one hand and the 20th Division on the other hand. Ahrar al-Qa’qa’/al-Qa’qa’ faction split from al-Hamzat Division and joined the 20th Division. So, clashes with machine guns broke out in al-Kana’es street and the streets adjacent to it. Three fighters were therefore killed, and 11 others were injured from both sides.

The internal clashes took place between the houses of civilians, some of whom displaced temporarily to safer neighborhoods fearing death during clashes, including Qasim al-Sufi. He witnessed the first hours of the clashes and told Hevdesti-Synergy that armed men of al-Hamzat Division stole houses during the civilians’ temporary displacement.

As soon as the clashes ended, al-Hamzat Division started to storm civilians’ houses. About this, al-Sufi said:²⁰

“As soon as the clashing ended, security officers of al-Hamzat Division started to storm and search houses in al-Kana’es street and the nearby streets alleging that the people there were biased to the enemy faction. Three civilians were arrested on charges of leaking information to the 20th Division. None of the residents dared

²⁰ The interview was conducted virtually on 18 July 2022. A pseudonym was used based on the witness’s willing.

to object or even lodge a complaint because of the absence of accountability in the SNA-held areas.”

- **Turkey Turns a Blind Eye to the Intra-Factional SNA Clashes:**

April, which marked the holy month of Ramada, saw the biggest toll of internal clashes between factions of the opposition SNA, where eight clashes took place, killing eight people and injuring 26 others, including two civilians.

On 20 April 2022, an internal clash broke out between fighters of Hayat Thaeroon for Liberation²¹ and the Military Police in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê. Security forces of Hayat Thaeroon for Liberation had arrested a member of the Military Police in Mabrouka town, west of Ras al-Ayn.

Hevesti-Synergy verified the participation of al-Hamzat Division’s fighters and others from the SNA, who are originally from the “Al-Akidat” tribe and since they are bound by virtue of tribal kinship, in the fighting alongside the Military Police against Hayat Thaeroon for Liberation. The fight extended to other parts of the city and caused the death of one fighter of al-Hamzat Division and injured three others from both sides.

Two days later, on 22 April 2022, a bloody fighting broke out between members of the Civil Police and fighters of Hayat Thaeroon for Liberation in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê city. Security officers of Hayat Thaeroon for Liberation arrested five members of the Civil Police who had attacked the brother of one of the security officers in his own grocery shop after he refused to sell them on credit. The security officers shaved the hair of three arrested members of the Civil Police and released the other two.

The clash killed six fighters on both sides, including Abul Karim al-Mawali, a commander in Hayat Thaeroon for Liberation, after he was critically injured. Additionally, 13 fighters were wounded, and at least two civilians, were injured.

²¹ It is an alliance founded on 23 January 2022 as a result of integration of Thaeroon Movement, which is formed of nine factions of the SNA, most notably: The Sultan Murad Division, Suleiman Shah Brigade/al-Amshat, and the Syrian Liberation Front/SLF, which is formed of two factions: al-Hamzat Division and the Mu'tasim Division. The new formation known as Hayat Thaeroon for Liberation is commanded by Fahim Issa.



Image No (03)- showing the highway in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê's market empty of people on 22 April 2022 during the clash between members of the Civil Police and fighters of Hayat Thaeroon for Liberation. Photo Credit: local activists

The clash created crossfire at the same time when “Marwa Issa” and her children were shopping to buy clothes and supplies for Eid. The gunfire spread terror in the market, which was packed with people during the last week of the holy month of Ramadan.

Issa, a Syrian displaced woman from Homs city and was transported by the Turkish forces along with her family from Jarablus city to Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê following Operation Peace Spring, expressed her resentment to Hevesti-Synergy about the armed chaos in the SNA-held areas. She said:²²

“The armed clashes broke out near al-Barid Roundabout and Haj Wasfi shop complex, which are usually packed with shoppers. Then the clashes extended to the northern neighborhood of the city. Civilians were terrified, especially women and children. A young man standing near us got a leg injury, so we hid inside the shop complex until it was nearly time for iftar [the breaking of the fast] and the Turkish patrols intervened to disengage the clashes.”

²² The interview was conducted virtually on 15 July 2022. A pseudonym was used based on the witnesses' willing.

According to Issa, the majority of the internal clashing/fighting among the SNA-affiliated factions take place nearby the Turkish forces but they turn a blind eye to them. She justified the reason for their [intervention](#) to resolve the recent clash, saying²³:

“The Turkish forces intervened only because the internal clashing coincided with the arrival of Abdullah Erin, governor of Turkey’s Şanlıurfa city, to Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê to attend a collective meal.”

Hevdesti-Synergy verified the visit of [Abdullah Erin](#), governor of Şanlıurfa, to the Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê in the evening of 22 April 2022 simultaneously with the internal fighting between the Civil Police and Hayat Thaeroon for Liberation. In the early hours of morning, 23 April 2022, the governor [posted](#) on his Facebook account²⁴ a photo of him visiting Ras al-Ayn and meeting the [Ras al-Ayn Local Council](#), affiliated with the Syrian Interim Government (SIG)/the opposition Syrian National Council (SNC), and joining a collective meal²⁵. In turn, the Ras al-Ayn Local Council [posted](#) on its official Facebook account a photo showing the Turkish governor’s visit.



Image No (04)- showing the photos [posted](#) by Abdullah Erin, governor of Turkey’s city of Şanlıurfa posted on the dawn of 23 April 2022. In the photos, he is talking about his visit to Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê. Photo credit: Abdullah Erin’s [official Facebook account](#).

²³ A [video](#) circulated on 22 April 2022 shows Turkish tanks and armored vehicles enter Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê to disengage the ongoing internal clashing between the warring factions affiliated to the SNA. (Last accessed 27 July 2022).

²⁴ The Facebook account has got a blue tick and it was verified that it is really the official account of Abdullah Erin, former governor of Turkey’s Şanlıurfa city.

²⁵ The Turkish governor posted photo of the visit at 2:27 am on 23 April 2022. From the photo, it is clear that he crossed the border point in the evening of 22 April 2022.

- **Absence of Effective Remedies to Victims in “Peace Spring” Territories:**

In May 2022, four intra-factional clashes broke out between the SNA’s factions. One civilian was killed and at least six others were injured. Five fighters of the warring factions were also killed and 16 others were injured.

On 4 May 2022, the third day of Eid al-Fitr, the civilian Thamer al-Tariha, a displaced man from “Al-Shaitat” tribe in Deir ez-Zor countryside, was killed in a shooting between fighters of Tajammu Ahrar al-Sharqiya and other fighters of the Military Police in the village of [al-Rawiya](#), west of Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê. The Military Police caught a human trafficking operation to Turkey by Tajammu Ahrar al-Sharqiya. The clash also killed a fighter of Tajammu Ahrar al-Sharqiya and injured another one form for the Military Police.

A farmer from al-Rawiya, who was near the scene and witnessed the death of the civilian Thamer al-Tariha, narrated to Hevdesti-Synergy details of the incident.²⁶

“Thamer was on his motorcycle waiting for someone when the shooting started out of the blue near him. He was shot with a few bullets and immediately died although the shooting lasted less than half an hour.”

²⁶ The interview was conducted virtually on 19 July 2022. The identity of the witness is withheld upon his request.



Image No (05)- showing a member from “Al-Shaitat” tribe in Deir ez-Zor, who is also a fighter of the SNA, sitting beside Thamer al-Tariha’s grave in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê. Al-Tariha was killed on 4 May 2022 as internal fighting broke out between fighters of the Military Police and fighters of Tajammu Ahrar al-Sharqiya in al-Rawiya village. Photo Credit: local activists

Ten days later, on 14 May 2022, an SNA fighter, identified as Salih al- Muhammad, hailed from al-Susah village in Deir ez-Zor countryside, was shot dead in the middle of Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê. The perpetrators are unknown.

The SNA disclosed no information concerning the incident. However, Munzer Ghali, a displaced man from Homs who lives in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê, told Hevdesti-Synergy that the crime was committed near al-Diwan Square in the city center. He continued as saying:²⁷

“As soon as Salih got out of his car, he was shot directly in the abdomen with two bullets from a vehicle (Hyundai Santa Fe), and he died from his injuries.”

²⁷The interview was conducted on 6 June 2022. Information about the eyewitness is withheld upon his request.

On 18 May 2022, sporadic internal fighting broke out and lasted for a whole day between fighters of the Military Police on the one hand and the Civil Police on the other hand in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê on the road linking al-Barid Roundabout and al-Jozah/al-A'alaf Roundabout on Tell Halaf town road.

According to the information obtained and verified by "Hevesti-Synergy", one fighter of the Civil Police was killed, and three others were injured. Two civilians were also injured, including Muhammed Naser al-Abdullah, who suffered serious injuries.

The most violent internal fighting in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê over the first half of 2022 started in the early hours of 25 May. Gunmen from "Al-Akidat" tribe, who are also fighters of with the SNA, attacked some of al-Hamzat Division-affiliated groups, whose members are from the "Al-Muwali" tribe. The fighting was because a commander known as Abu Homsî al-Muwali in Khalid al-Abdulla Division, affiliated with the al-Hamzat Division, had killed the young man Muhammad al-'Awad al-Da'ar, a fighter of the SNA and also a member from "Al-Akidat" tribe in the east countryside of Deir ez-Zor.

For revenge, as described by members of "Al-Akidat" tribe in audio recordings published on groups on WhatsApp and Telegram, the tribe gathered all gunmen loyal to them in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and its countryside and launched a wide attack with light and medium weapons on headquarters run by groups affiliated with "Al-Muwali" tribe primarily in the al-Hamzat Division.

A [video](#) filmed on 25 May 2022, documented clashing between the two sides near Ibn Khaldoon high school in al-Mahta al-Shamali neighborhood. The video clearly shows the use of machine guns and RPGs among the residential neighborhoods.

As a result of the clashes, gunmen from "Al-Akidat" tribe quickly took over several neighborhoods in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê city and some villages in the west and south countryside, amid fear and panic among civilians, especially women and children. Dozens of families temporarily displaced outside the city and some of them were housed in al-Amin Hall for Weddings located on al-Hasakah highway south of Ras al-Ayn. At least four civilians, including a woman and a child, were injured during the clashing.

Another victim of the clashing was a Turkish woman, Kar Piyaz Dimir, 40, who lives in Turkey's Ceylanpinar city, adjacent to Syria's Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê. A stray bullet coming from the direction of Syria's Ras al-Ayn hit her neck and she was moved to the state hospital in Ceylanpinar for treatment, according to Turkish [media outlets](#).



Image no (06)- showing the Turkish lady Kar Piyaz Dimir receiving treatment in the state hospital in Turkey's Ceylanpinar city after she was injured with a stray bullet coming from the direction of Syria's Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê on the Turkish border due to internal fighting between gunmen of “Al-Akidat” tribe and others of “Al-Muwali” tribe. photo credit: the Turkish website urfadasin

Additionally, Abdurrahman Kaji, a resident of Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê was injured with a shrapnel in the face. Gun machines and RPGs were used in the clashing, causing huge material damage to the residents' houses and cars.

The clash killed three fighters and injured eight others of al-Hamzat Division, who are also members of “Al-Muwali” tribe. Three fighters of the SNA who are at the same time members of the “Al-Akidat” tribe were also injured.

A civilian whose house was damaged in the fighting told Hevesti-Synergy that he lodged a complaint to the Military Police and to the Ras al-Ayn Local Council demanding repairs to his house, but instead he was mocked. He narrated as saying:²⁸

“An artillery rocket hit my house in Zaradasht neighborhood during the last clashing and I am very thankful to God that none of my family got hurt. After the clashing subsided, I filed a complaint to the Military Police and another one to the Ras al-Ayn Local Council against the warring factions. I demanded repairs to my house, so we could go back to it again, but they mocked me. One member of the Ras al-Ayn Local Council told me, taunting: ‘Go home. It is good that you and your family are well.’”

²⁸ The interview was conducted via a phone call on 30 May 2022. Identity of the witness is not revealed for his safety.



Images No (7) and (8)- Showing some of the damage inflicted to residents' houses and cars in Zaradasht neighborhood in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê on 25 May 2022 as a result of internal fighting between gunmen of “Al-Akidat” tribe and others of “al-Muwali” tribe, who are fighters of the SNA in Ras al-Ayn. Photo credit: local activists

- **A Jeweler Killed at Midday During a Theft:**

In June 2022, two cases of internal clashes broke out in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê, where two fighters were killed and five others were injured. In late June, a jeweler was killed by anonymous gunmen during a robbery.

Two days later, on 18 June 2022, a severe internal clash broke out between Tajammu Ahrar al-Sharqiya on one hand and al-Hamzat Division and the 20th Division on the other hand in Tal Dhiab village in the west of Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê. The fighting was due to prolonged conflict between the two sides to seize a fuel station and a farm belonging to people who were forcibly displaced. Light and medium weapons and artillery rockets were used in the clash, causing a temporary displacement of civilians in the area. Two fighters were killed and three were critically injured. As a consequence, Al-Hamzat Division took over headquarters of Tajammu Ahrar al-Sharqiya.

On 30 June 2022, the jeweler Muhammad al-Barhawi, a Chechen man, was killed when two masked gunmen riding a motorcycle shot him in front of his house in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê. Recorded videos²⁹ from security surveillance cameras of al-Barhawi’s house show how the masked gunmen stealing a bag from his hand.

The next day, dozens of people demonstrated to bury al-Barhawi, protesting against the state of insecurity and armed chaos which has spread in the region since Turkey occupied it and gave full control to the opposition SNA-affiliated factions.

The protesters chanted “**Peace Spring, no security**” to indicate lack of safety in the “safe area”, demanding Turkey to control security and hold violators accountable.

- **Crossfire in Front of a Bakery Packed with Civilians:**

In July, three internal fighting broke out between the SNA’s factions in “Peace Spring” strip. One of the fighting erupted between fighters of Liwa Shuhada’a Badr affiliated with al-Hamzat Division on the one hand and fighters of the Sultan Murad Division on the other hand due to disputes over queues to get bread in front a private bakery in Tell Halaf town. Machine guns were used in the clash on July 21, 2022, by fighters of the two warring parties amid the presence of people who gathered in front of the bakery to get bread. The clash injured two girls and two fighters of the SNA.

- **Young Man Killed in Internal Fighting Between Fighters of an Armed Group:**

On August 10, 2022, the young man “About al-Modhi” died of injuries he sustained in a crossfire between two armed groups operating under the al-Hamzat Division in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê.

²⁹ Many local websites published them on social media. “Hevesti-Synergy” keeps a copy in its online database.

The internal fight broke out between two armed groups operating under the al-Hamzat Division. The first group is commanded by "Abo Shihab al-Mawali" and the second one comprises fighters from the Arab tribe "Adwan". The latter attacked the military headquarter of the al-Mawali group in the village of Ayn al-Hisan in the south of Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê on the backdrop of arresting two persons from the Arab tribe "Adwan". The fighting caused injuries from both sides.

- **Internal Fighting due to Arresting a Woman from "Al-Akidat" Tribe:**

On October 11, 2022, a violent internal fight broke out between Tajammu Ahrar al-Sharqiya's fighters who belong to the "Al-Akidat" tribe and fighters of the Military Police in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê city.

Fighters who belong to the "Al-Akidat" tribe attacked the Military Police headquarter in Ras al-Ayn as the latter had arrested a woman from "Al-Akidat" tribe without disclosing the reason behind the arrest. Light and medium weapons, RPGs and mortar shells were used in the internal fighting.

Tense prevailed in the city and its adjacent villages on the wake of arresting the woman. Fighters who belong to the "Al-Akidat" tribe attacked several points run by the Military Police, which in turn asked for support from other SNA's factions such as al-Hamzat Division. It should be mentioned that fighters of the Military Police in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê are formed from the al-Hamzat Division.

Although the civilians remained inside their homes during the internal fight, crossfire and random shooting from both sides injured 10 civilians, including a woman. All of them were hospitalized for treatment.



SYNERGY تآر
HEVDESTÎ هصدت

Hevdestî - Synergy Association for Victims, is a non-governmental, non-profit organization, aimed at educating and providing a platform and a space for victims to represent themselves and claim their rights. Synergy was founded on March 11, 2021, to seek justice for the victims of conflict in North and East Syria and to contribute to the process of accountability and justice.

We work to document all human rights violations in North and East Syria, and preserve evidence, documents and testimonies in order to contribute to the processes of truth-revealing, accountability and justice. In addition to build the capacities of the victims and advocate for their issues, with the aim of building a society demanding its rights.

We are committed to the highest degrees of accuracy and integrity, including seeking multiple perspectives to develop an in-depth and analytical understanding of events. We are cognizant of our responsibility towards the victims and witnesses who share their experiences with us. We are working closely with a wide range of actors in local and international civil society to achieve the greatest possible impact.