Syria: Disinformation in the Context of Deir ez-Zor Unrest

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Deir ez-Zor

Military operations were accompanied by misleading reporting using old and fake visuals inciting violence, threatening civil peace

True Platform

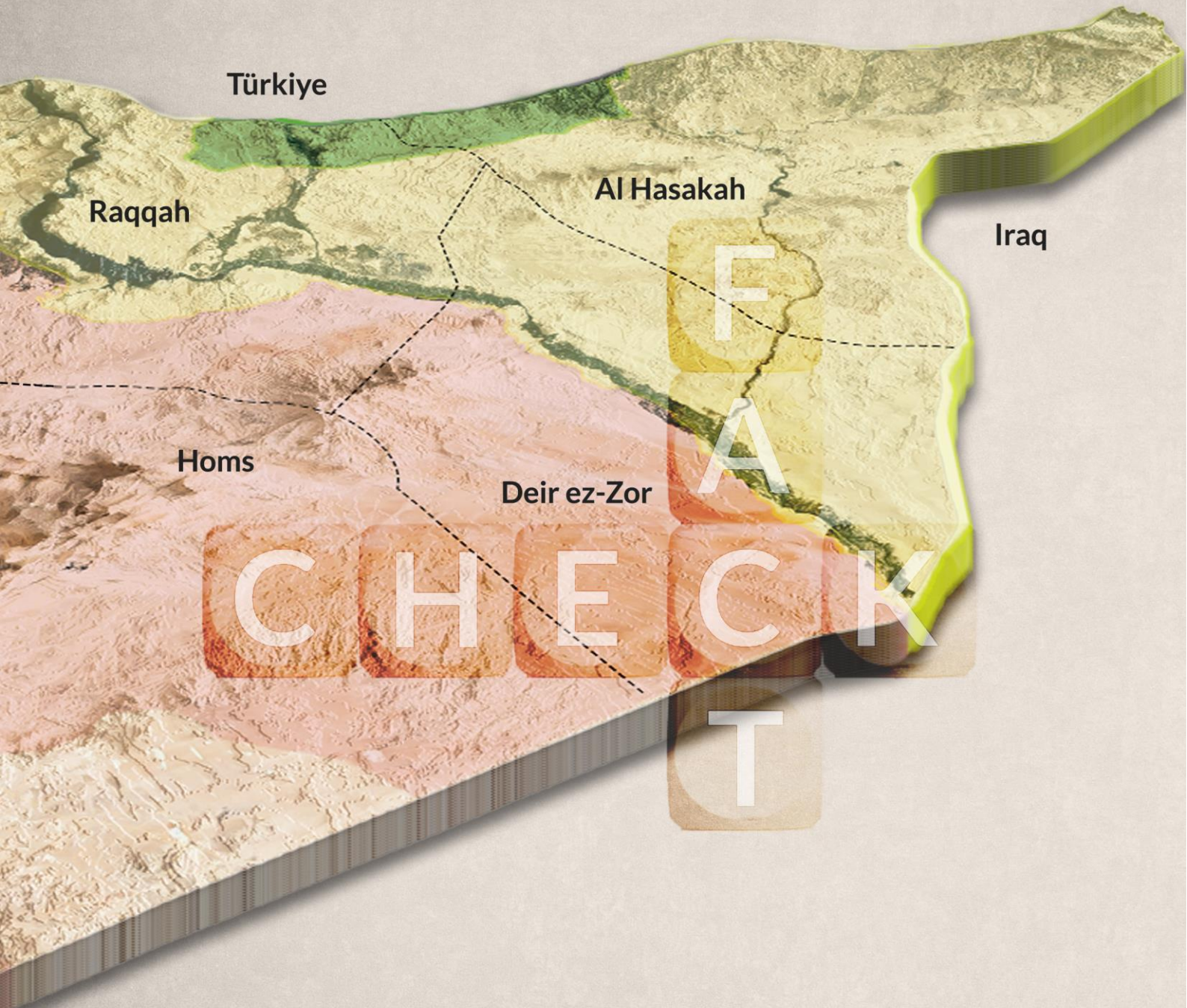سوريون من أجل الحقيقة والعدالة
Syrians For Truth & Justice

Syria: Disinformation in the Context of Deir ez-Zor Unrest

Military operations were accompanied by misleading reporting using old and fake visuals inciting violence, threatening civil peace

Contents

Background

On the evening of 27 August 2023, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) announced through its internet accounts and media outlets in northeastern Syria, the launch of Operation Security Reinforcement in Deir ez-Zor aiming at eradicating the Islamic State (also known as IS or Daesh) terrorist cells, thwarting their potential attacks, and pursuing criminals responsible for perpetrating injustices against the local population. It also aims at tracking down smugglers who exploit the populace's livelihoods.

Meanwhile, local social media accounts and media outlets affiliated with the Deir ez-Zor Military Council of the SDF published a video showing Jalal al-Khubai, brother of Ahmed al-Khubail (better known as Abu Khawla), the commander of Deir ez-Zor Military Council. Jalal exclaimed in the video that the SDF had besieged them in the Khashman neighbourhood in al-Hasakah and arrested the Emir Ahmed al-Khubail from its al-Wazir base and thus called upon members of Al-Aqeedat clan to encircle all of the SDF headquarters in Deir ez-Zor to pressure it to release Ahmed. Jalal threatened to respond strongly if his demands were not met and warned that the battle was no longer between the SDF and Arab tribes but between the Kurds and Arabs.

The two sides engaged in hate speech and disinformation, including publishing old images and videos unrelated to the conflict or of other conflicts, as well as dismantling fake news on social media and media outlets. This media incitement fueled the hostilities and widened the communal rift, posing serious threats to civil peace, especially between the Arabs and Kurds.

Less than 24 hours after the spread of al-Khubail video, which was verified true in relation to the killing of the commander of Deir ez-Zor Military Council and some of its members, a video spread showing military engagements allegedly between the SDF and Arab tribes in al-Ma'amel area in the north of Deir ez-Zor. However, it turned out that the video was first published on the internet by Yemeni accounts in March 2021, including the Yemen Today YouTube Channel, the verified Alhadath Yemen Facebook page, and several other local Yamani social media accounts and pages.

The present report is the result of cooperation between Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ), True Platform team, specialized in verifying information and analyzing hate speech and Suwar Magazine. The report was built on close monitoring of the Deir ez-Zor unrest and it aims to highlight misleading information spread through online accounts and websites affiliated with the conflicting parties.

The spread of false or misleading information is rampant among various media outlets and social media accounts. This is particularly true regarding updates on the developments on the ground and the results of confrontations, often with the aim of portraying one side as superior to the other. This further endangers the fragile peace in the area. The ongoing battles have already caused military and civilian casualties from both sides, as well as internal displacements.

Moreover, media incitement and disinformation have created deep-seated biases among the public towards the conflicting parties. This was done by exploiting the various narratives that were used to depict the conflict, most notably the ethnic war between Syrian Arabs and Kurds. Furthermore, the media malicious took advantage of the tensions that preceded the conflict, caused by the poor governance and corruption of military and civil administration authorities in the area, which was reflected in ignoring the populace's demands. It is important to remember

that eastern Deir ez-Zor has been hit hard by the deterioration of services in all areas, including education and health. This has resulted in repeated protests from locals.

The present report was built on the outcomes of the monitoring and verification operations conducted since the conflict's onset. We reveal in this report 16 videos and images found to be misleading. Most of these materials were old and unrelated to the recent conflict in Deir ez-Zor. Some pro-opposition media outlets used these materials in the context of reporting on the unrest in Deir ez-Zor wrongly or intentionally.

The research team utilized multiple audit methods to ensure accuracy, including reverse image and video search technology on significant search engines such as Google. They also searched social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Telegram. In some instances, geographical identification technology was also used and linked with satellite images.

It's important to remember that a lot of misleading information is initially published on personal or public web pages, some are fake. We will not mention every instance of disinformation that we find in order to prevent unintentionally promoting materials that could incite violence, hate, or killings. STJ has released a report on hate speech related to the recent unrest in Deir ez-Zor.

Here are some of the misleading publications.

Exaggeration and Manipulation of Field Facts

As soon as the news of the arrest of Abu Khawla was confirmed on 28 August, a video spread talking about clashes between the Deir ez-Zor Military Council and the SDF in al-Ma'amel area in the north of Deir ez-Zor. But it later turned out that this is an old video circulated by Yemeni Facebook, and YouTube accounts on 25 March 2021 under the description 'Watch- Night Clashes east of Jabaliyah and the Airport Sector, New Losses to the Houthis'.

Image 1- A screenshot of the video published on the Yemen Today YouTube Channel on 25 March 2021.

At a time when it was impossible to verify the events on the ground and the reports on them, this video went viral on social media. It was posted by local opposition accounts with tens of thousands of followers.

Image 2- A screenshot of the pro-opposition Khabour Facebook account that posted the video after adjusting its length and under the description "clashes in al-Ma'amel area in the north of Deir ez-Zor."

A local Facebook page with a large following posted the same video twice in a single day, with only 18 minutes between the posts. The page claimed that the video depicted clashes in two different parts of Deir ez-Zor. The first post contained 00:51 seconds of the video and claimed that it showed clashes in the al-Ma'amel area located in the north of Deir ez-Zor. The second post contained 01:09 minutes of the video and claimed to depict engagements in the al-Busayrah town, which is situated in the eastern part of Deir ez-Zor. It's worth noting that the original video is actually 01:10 minutes in length.
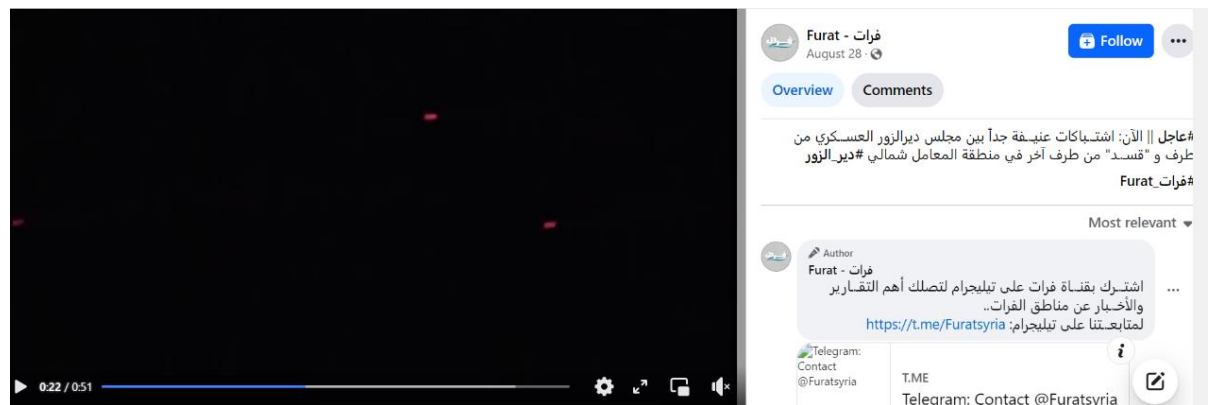

Image 3- A screenshot of the Furat Facebook page posted the video under the description "Fierce clashes between Deir ez-Zor Military Council and the SDF in al-Ma'amel area."
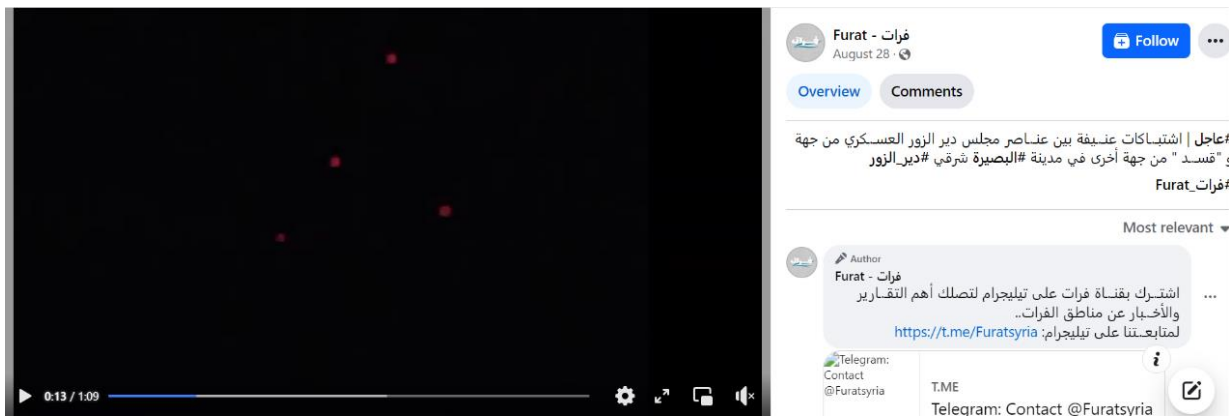
Image 4- A screenshot of the video posted for the second time on the Furat Facebook page under the description "Fierce clashes between Deir ez-Zor Military Council and the SDF in al-Busayrah town."

Image 5- A screenshot of the Yemen Today YouTube Channel showing the same video with elements matching those of the video published on the Furat Facebook page.

The verification revealed that the same misleading video was repeatedly posted with varying descriptions, falsely attributing it to different locations. This indicates that the video was intentionally used to depict an exaggerated and unrealistic perception of the events happening on the ground. These videos have caused an escalation in tensions between the parties involved during an already sensitive period. Furthermore, it has caused more disturbance to the peace of the local community which has already been struggling with security and weapon-related issues for years.

A Swirl of Disinformation

On 29 September 2023, the second day of confrontations, local Facebook pages published three videos allegedly for sporadic clashes in Deir ez-Zor. However, verification processes through Google and Facebook revealed that the videos were used in misleading contexts.

One of the videos was circulated claiming to show clashes taking place in Dhiban town, which is known to be the stronghold of Ibrahim al-Havel. However, a reverse search of the video revealed that it was originally published by accounts that support the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) on January 18, 2020. At that time, the SDF information center had released the video with the title 'Clashes between the SDF and the Syrian National Army (SNA) in Ayn Issa suburbs', and it was quickly spread on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. It is worth noting that pro-Syrian opposition media outlets, including Orient News, Syria TV, and Halab Today TV, used the video to report on unrest in Deir ez-Zor without verifying its authenticity.
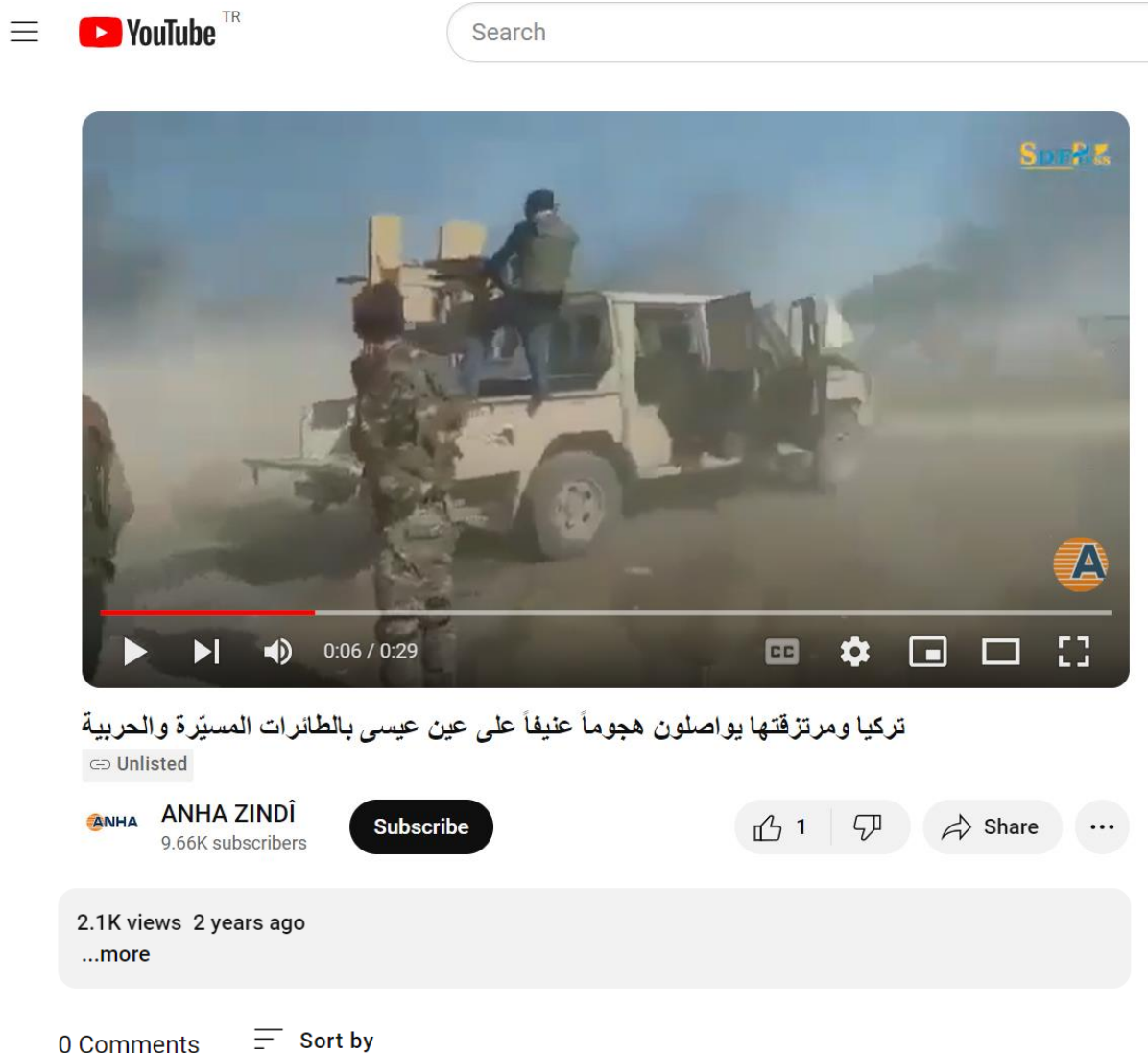

Image 6- A screenshot of the Hawar News Agency (ANHA) YouTube channel published the aforementioned video appended with the description, "Türkiye and its mercenaries continue a violent attack on Ayn Issa with drones and warplanes."
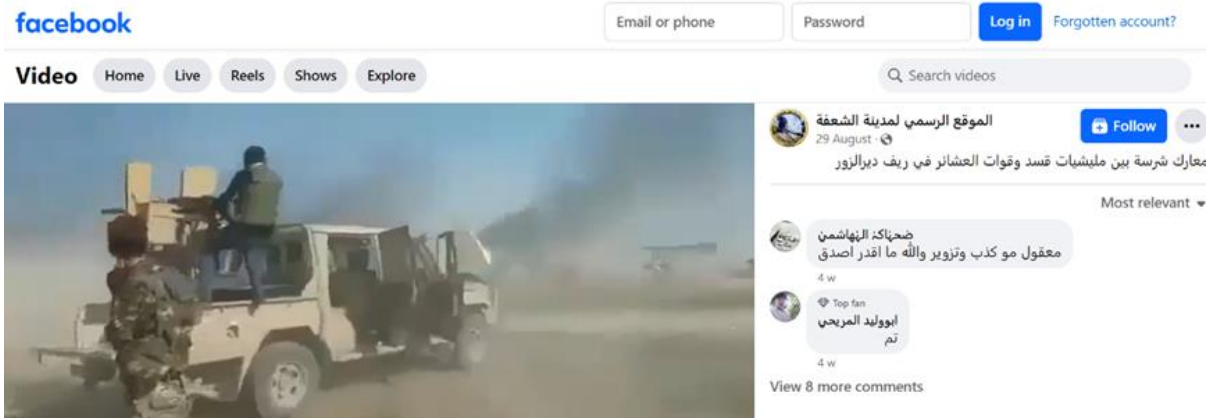
Image 7- A screenshot of a Facebook page named "The official site of Ash Sha'fah city" published the same video with the description "Fierce battles between SDF militias and tribal forces in rural Deir ez-Zor."

Image 8- A screenshot of Orient's official Facebook account posted the same video with the description, "Deir ez-Zor tribes announce general mobilization against the SDF, dozens killed."
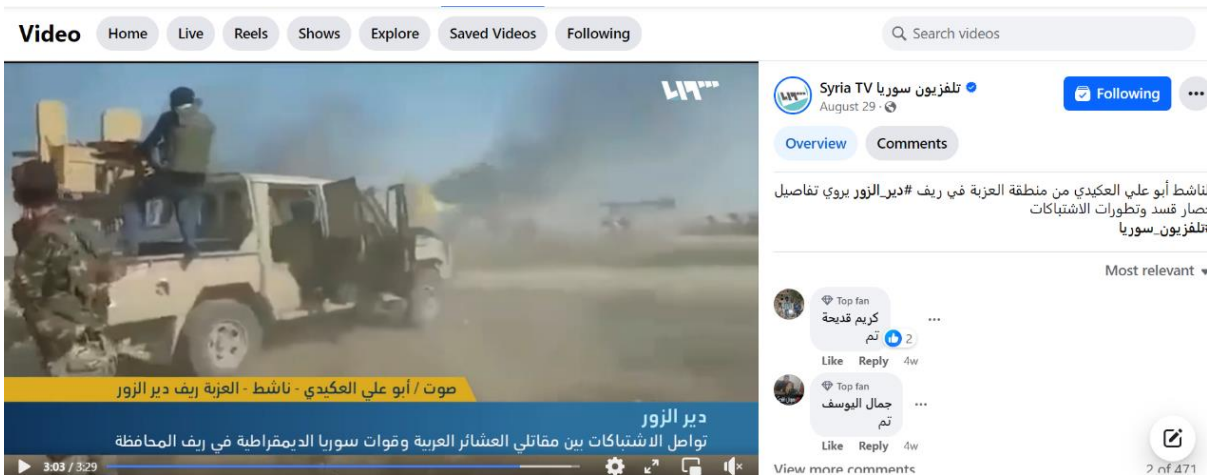

Image 9- A screenshot of Syria TV's official Facebook account posted the same video in the context of Deir ez-Zor unrest coverage.

The second misleading video was circulated on Facebook accounts and pages as being of very violent clashes in the al-Busayrah town in Deir ez-Zor. However, the research showed that the same clip was published on YouTube three years ago, under the description "The fight of Beit Joibar and Beit Ka'id 2020."

Image 10- A screenshot of the abovementioned video entitled "Very violent clashes in the al-Busayrah town in Deir ez-Zor."
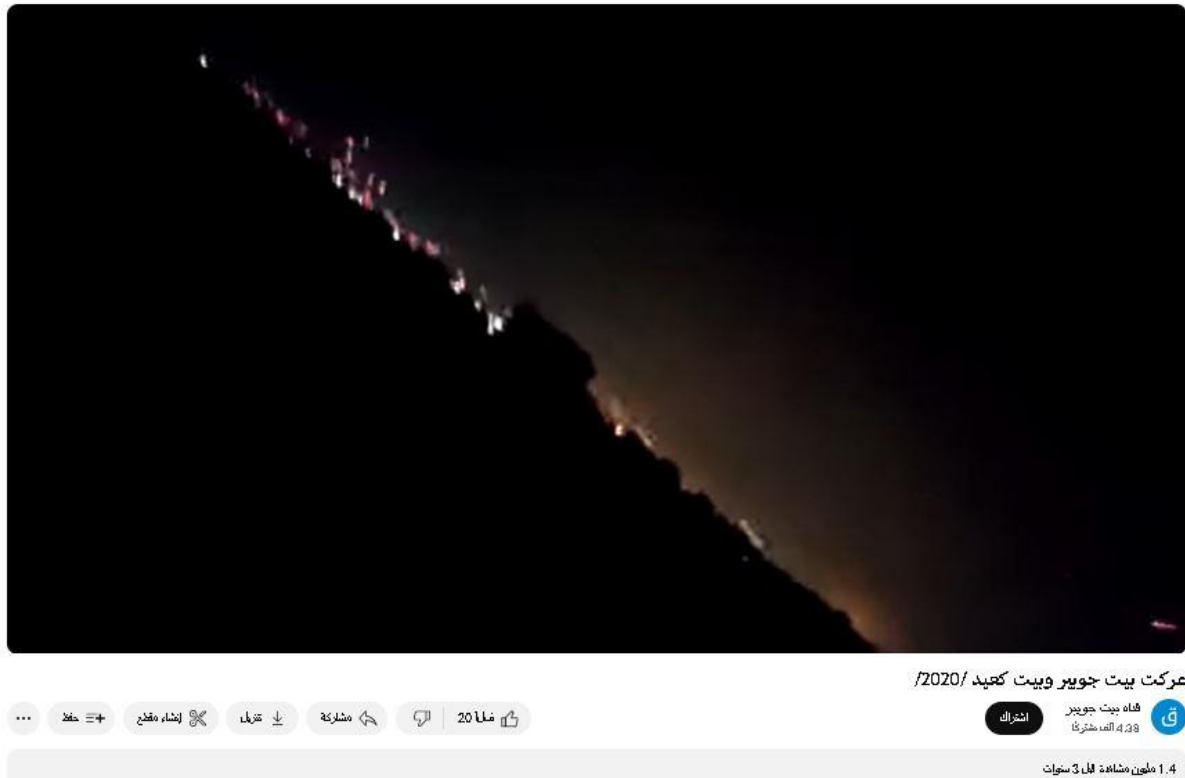

Image 11- A screenshot of the same video published on YouTube with the caption "The fight of Beit Joibar and Beit Ka'id 2020."

Notably, pro-opposition media outlets, including the Orient News, used part of the video at the beginning of a report it published on 3 September, four days after its spread on social media, under the title "Fierce battles fought by tribal members with #SDF militias in #al-Busayrah, rural #Deir ez-Zor.. What is the importance of this town? #Orient
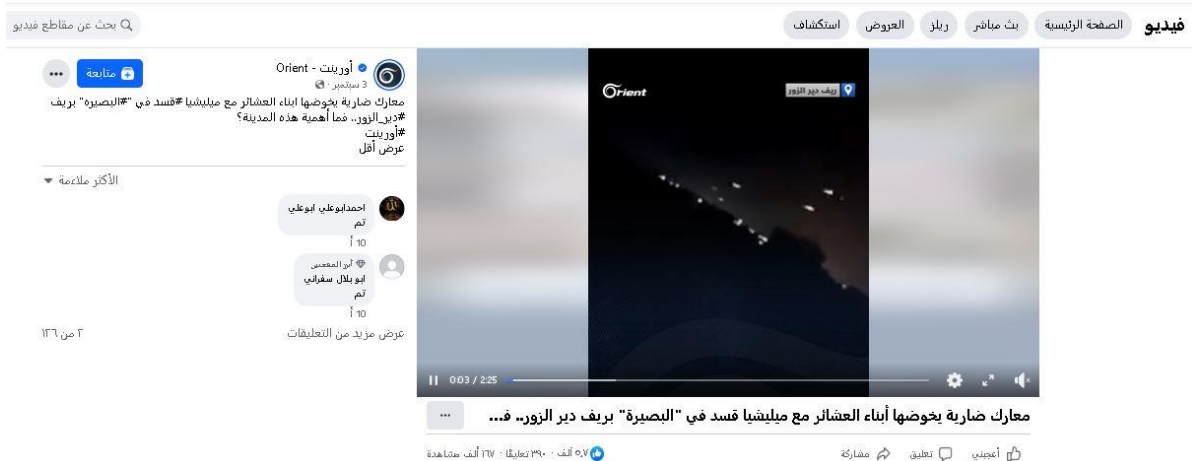
Image 12- A screenshot of the Orient News' Facebook page posted the video with a caption reporting clashes in Deir ez-Zor.

The third misleading video was circulated by social media accounts as being of clashes in Dhiban town. Our investigation revealed that the video is old and was first published on 21 August 2022. It was described as a year ago clashes between Iraqi armed factions in Samawah City, Iraq.

Image 13- A screenshot of the video posted on a local Facebook page with claims of showing clashes in Dhiban.

Image 14- A screenshot of the video posted a year ago on Facebook.

After closely monitoring the three videos, it became evident that they had gone viral on public and private Facebook pages and accounts, some of which have tens of thousands of followers. Subsequently, media outlets with millions of viewers shared the videos. Evidently, these videos were often published intentionally to incite tension in Deir ez-Zor. This was confirmed by the inflammatory and provocative language describing the videos on social media and media outlets.

Dozens of online accounts, both public and private, spread a video showing SDF fighters supposedly fleeing their military post in Jadeed Ekedat village, rural Deir ez-Zor. Some of these accounts were borrowed or fake. On 31 August Syria TV published the video but later removed it.

Images 15 and 16- Screenshots of the video published on Syria TV's website (right) and official Facebook account (left). The TV removed the video later.
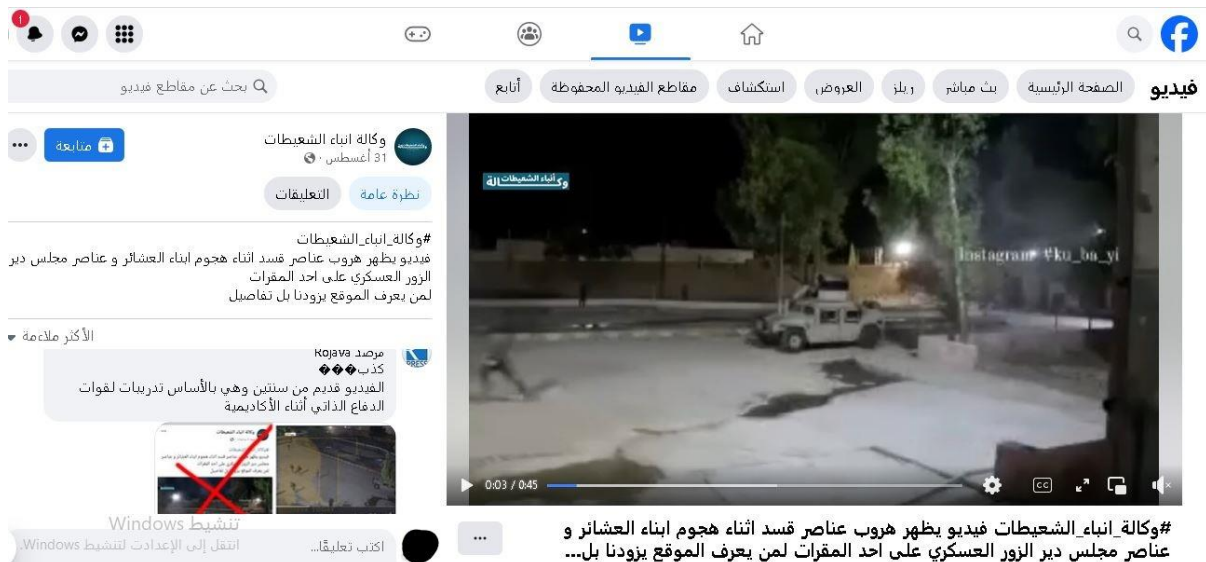

Image 17- A screenshot of a local Facebook page posted the video with a caption claims it documented the flee of SDF fighters from a military point of them following an attack by tribal fighters.

However, the verification revealed that the video was edited and zoomed out to conceal certain elements. We found that the original video was actually uploaded on 10 August 2021

by the Self-Defense Forces/Hêzên Xweparastinê YouTube channel. The video was a documentation of a military training session conducted by the Self-Defense Forces at the Academy of Martyr Hassan Darwish of the AANES.
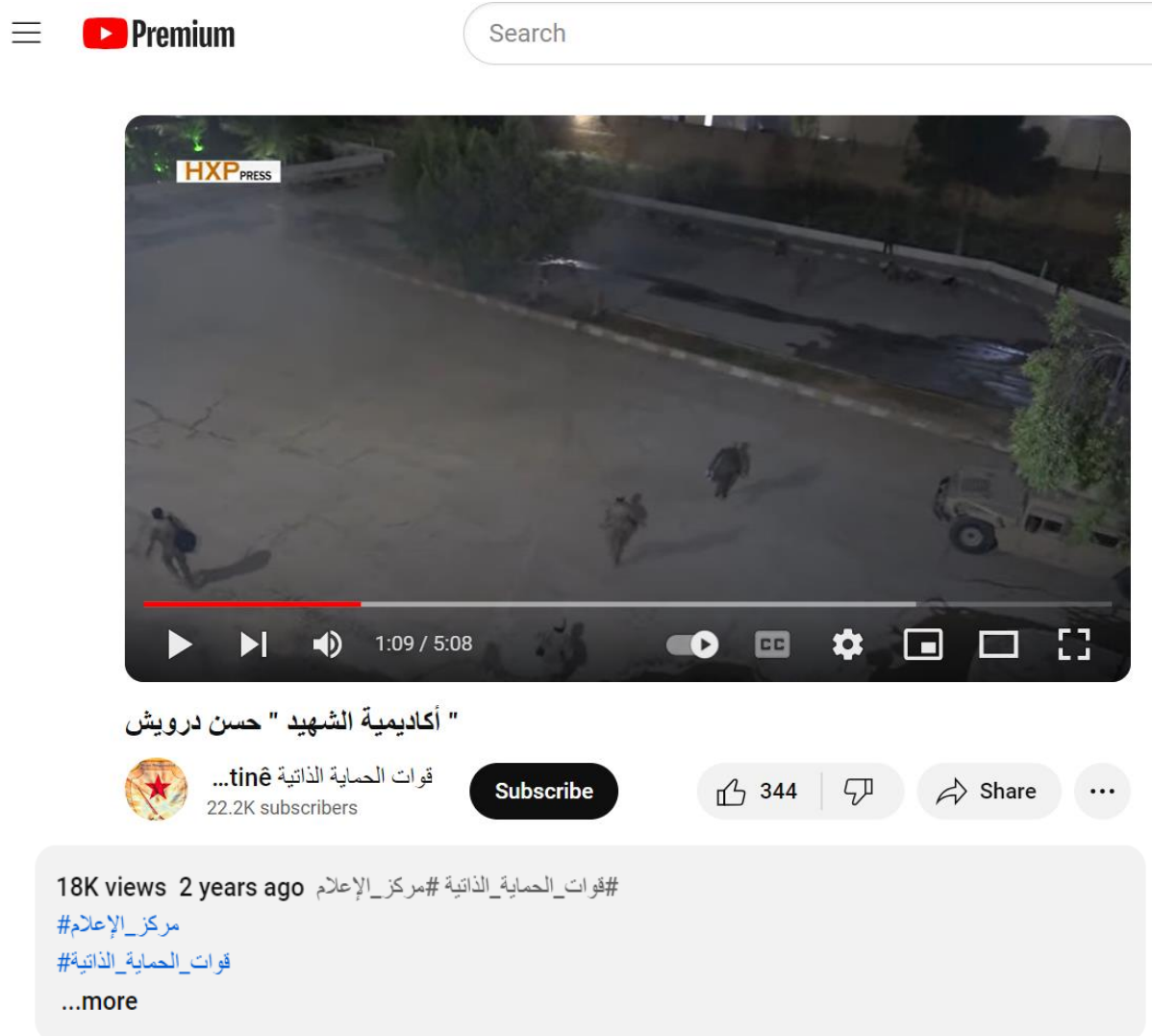
Image 18- A screenshot of the original video used to mislead in the context of the latest Deir ez-Zor unrest.

On 31 August 2023, the pro-opposition Syria TV released a video titled "Fierce Clashes and Heavy Explosions Rock Al-Shuhayl Town, Rural Deir ez-Zor." We tracked the video and discovered that on the 7th of that same month, it was published by Syria TV on Facebook with a different description, saying it was of an Israeli bombardment on a site in northern Damascus located between the towns of Sednayah and Manin and resulted in the deaths of four Syrian Army members and the injury of four others.
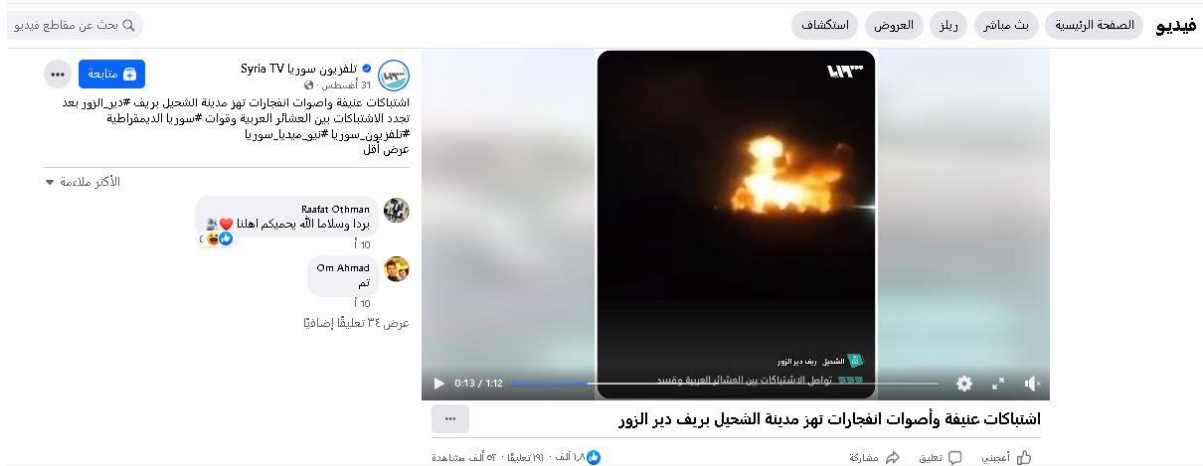
Image 19- A screenshot of the video published by Syria TV under the title "Fierce Clashes and Heavy Explosions Rock Al-Shuhayl Town, Rural Deir ez-Zor."

Image 20- A screenshot of the video published by Syria TV with a description claiming it shows Israeli bombardment on a site north of Damascus.

The use of the same video by Syria TV in different contexts raises concerns of intentional disinformation that has already expanded deadly hostilities and further fueled divisions between the area's Arab and Kurdish components. It is important to note that Syria TV published old videos related to the Deir ez-Zor unrest without verifying their accuracy. After tracking this video, it was discovered that many pro-opposition and pro-government Facebook pages, some with tens of thousands of followers, had used it with different descriptions.

Image 21- A screenshot of the al-Sharqiyah24 Facebook page, which has 400k followers, posted the aforementioned video under the description, "Explosions in Dhiban town, rural Deir ez-Zor, coinciding with the intensification of clashes between tribal fighters and the SDF militia."

Image 22- A screenshot of a Facebook page named Homs- Palmyra Division affiliated with the Ba'ath Party posted the video under the description, "Explosions in Dhiban town coinciding with fierce clashes between the SDF, Deir ez-Zor Military Council, and tribal members."

Adversary Disinformation

The misleading about field situation was not limited to one party. Official figures of the SDF and activists supporting it were found to be involved in publishing misleading information and videos that were taken out of context. The official X (formerly Twitter) account of Siyamend Ali, the head of the People's Defense Units (YPG) information office, shared a video on 2 September that showed fighters crossing a small river. The caption on the video read, "Armed factions crossing the river (Euphrates) to access eastern Deir ez-Zor. These are the gangs our forces resist."

Image 23- A screenshot of Siyamend Ali's post on X.

Tracking down the video, we discovered that it had been uploaded by several anti-SDF Facebook accounts and pages. Their descriptions implied that the footage depicted tribal fighters crossing the Sajur River en route to Manbij, located in northern rural Aleppo, on 2 September 2023, to engage in battle against the SDF. We were unable to locate any sources that could confirm the video was filmed in the vicinity of the Euphrates River in Deir ez-Zor.
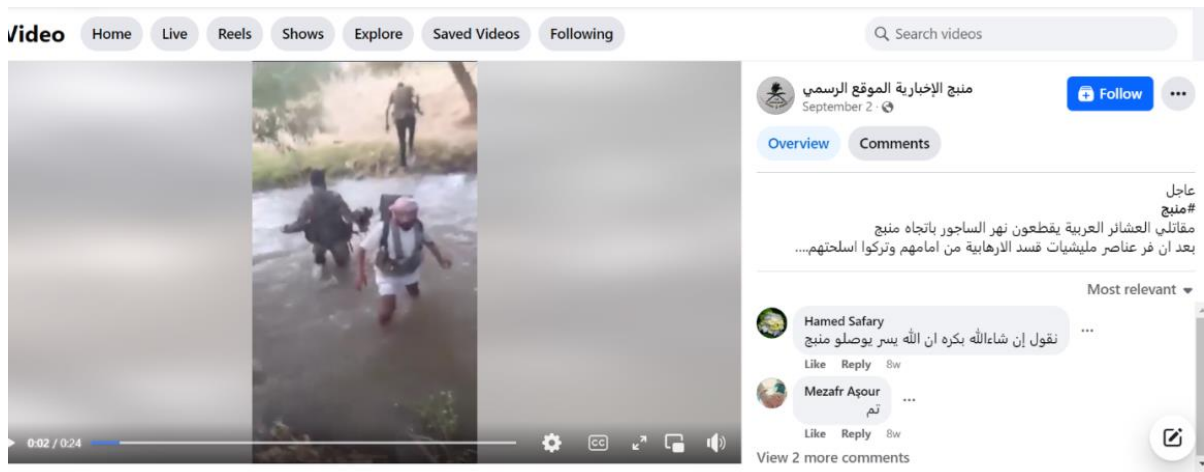
Image 24- A screenshot a local Facebook page posted the video under a caption claim that the river shown is the Sajur, as the tweet of the SDF official stated.

We conducted a thorough investigation by comparing the video in question with another video that showed an official and members of the pro-government militia National Defense Forces (NDF) crossing the Euphrates River. Our investigation led us to the conclusion that the river in the circulated video cannot be the Euphrates. The river in the matched video had a high water level, making it impossible to cross on foot.

Image 25- A screenshot from the matched video showing Hashem Masoud al-Sattam, an official of the NDF, along with his members crossing the Euphrates. They are coming from the areas under the control of the regime and allied Iranian militias, and are heading to fight against the SDF. The image clearly indicates that it is impossible to cross the Euphrates on foot.

In addition, the width of the river shown in the circulated video is only 10 meters. However, our partners' research for this report indicates that the narrowest point of the Euphrates River in Deir ez-Zor is 100 meters wide. It is worth noting that the video was posted online prior to Siyamend Ali's publication of it.

Although we were unable to locate the video itself, we were able to match the surroundings featured in the video with images and videos of the Sajur River, including a video that was published on 2 September 2023. This video was verified through satellite images by SYRgeolocation.

Image 26- A screenshot from a video filmed on Manbij fronts shows an environment similar to that appeared in the video in question. Credit: Al-Furat News Network.

Image 27- A satellite image showing the same hill appeared in the previous image near the Sajur River. Credit: SYRgeolocation

In the same context, we detect videos of tribal fighters near the Sajur River, published on September 1st and 2nd, show an environment very similar to that seen in the video published by Siyamend Ali. We also referred to a report aired on Orient TV in 2017 about the Sajur River, and found that its riverbed is narrower and its flow weaker than that of the Euphrates. Therefore, we can conclude that Siyamend Ali's publication of the video in question is misleading.

On 2 September, a number of Facebook accounts and pages that support the AANES and the SDF shared a video that purportedly shows a violent bombing by the international coalition of an Iranian militia bases in al-Mayadin town in rural Deir ez-Zor. The video's dissemination implies a desire for retaliation against the Iranian militias, who are accused of pitting the area against the SDF. The video in question was shared by several accounts, including one belonging to a pro-SDF media activist who had edited it. The edited version was shared 17 times. However, it has been verified that the video is not recent and was previously circulated by Syrian opposition and pro-Facebook media and pages as footage of an Israeli bombing near Damascus that occurred in early August of 2023.
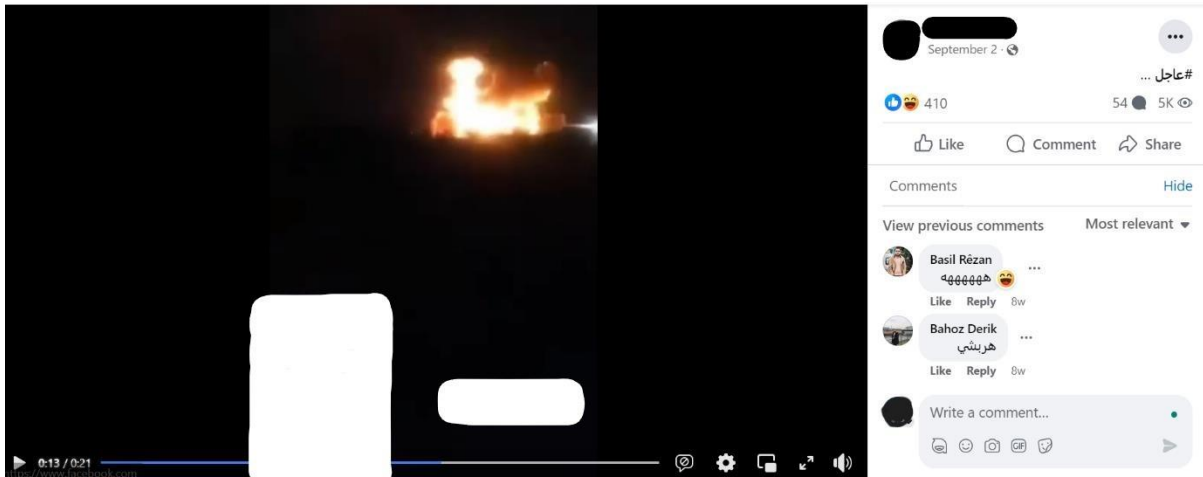
Image 28- A screenshot of an edited version of the video in question posted by a media activist.
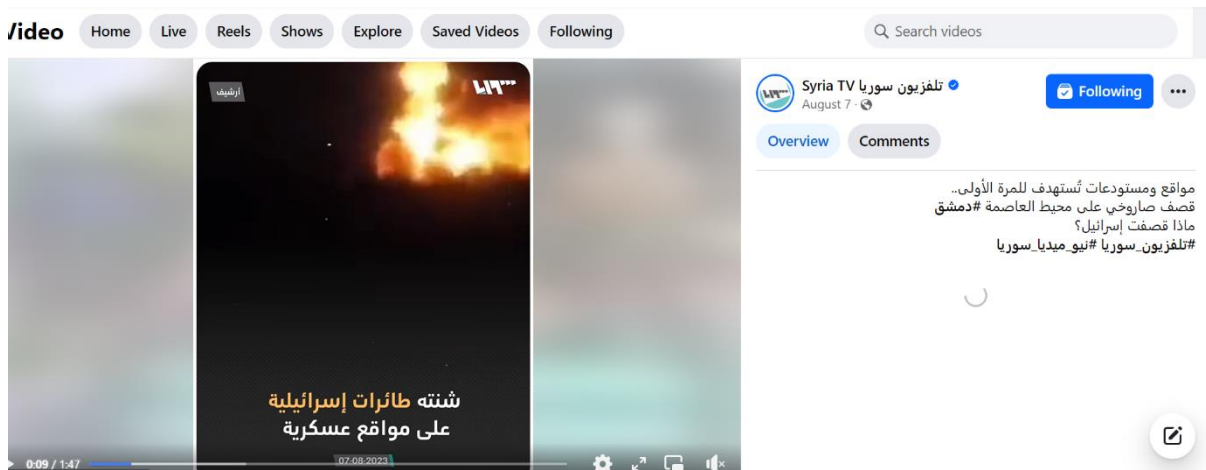
Image 29- A screenshot of a report published by Syria TV on an Israeli missile attack near Damascus.

Fabricated Statements

On 4 September, several opposition and pro-Syrian government Facebook pages and personal accounts circulated a statement attributed to Farhad Shami, head of SDF's Media Center. The statement said, "Entering Dhiban would be suicidal," and "I encourage negotiation to avoid further violations and killing." The Facebook pages and accounts statement claimed in a post that Farhad gave the statement to a source named Rojava Observatory.

Image 30- A screenshot of the fabricated statement posted by Nashit News.

Image 31- A screenshot of the fabricated statement posted by H.S.S 40.

We used Google and Facebook to verify the claims made during our investigation. However, we were unable to find any credible news source named Rojava Observatory, except for a Facebook page named "Rojava مرصد" which supports the AANES and the SDF. We did not come across any similar statement by Farhad on this page, his personal accounts, or those on the SDF. Our research also revealed that some of these pages had previously shared misleading

clips during their [coverage](#) of the events in Deir ez-Zor, which raises the possibility that their publication of Farhad Shami's fabricated statement was a deliberate attempt to spread misinformation.

Image 32- A screenshot of the video, which turned out to be misleading, posted on H.S.S 40 Facebook page.

Image 33- A screenshot of the same video posted on Nashit News Facebook page.

Misleading "Victories"

On 5 September at 03:13 am, a journalist loyal to the SDF [posted](#) on Facebook, "The SDF completed a sweep operation of Dhiban town, eastern rural Deir ez-Zor"

قوات سوريا الديمقراطية تنتهي من عملية تمشيط بلدة ذيبان في ريف ديرالزرو الشرقي.

Image 34- A screenshot of the abovementioned post.

However, through investigations, we found a tweet by Farhad Shami, head of SDF's Media Center, published on the evening of 5 September 5, denying full control over the town of Dhiban.

Farhad Shami ✔
@farhad_shami

تحديث

قواتنا تنفذ حالياً خطة حسم تطهير الذيبان كما هو مخطط لها، وكل ما هو مخالف لذلك معلومات كاذبة وتمهيد للهزيمة من قبل قنوات وإعلام الفتنة.
قواتنا تسيطر على ٨٠٪ من الذيبان وسط فرار المجموعات المسلحة الدخيلة إلى الضفة الأخرى لنهر الفرات.

Translate post

10:28 PM · Sep 5, 2023 · **26.2K** Views

💬 43   ↻ 35   ♡ 260   🔖 3   ⬆️

Image 35- A screenshot of the tweet by Farhad Shami, head of SDF's Media Center, refuting claims of their full control over Dhiban.

It is relevant to recall that on 6 September, the SDF regained control of Dhiban, whose significance stems from being the stronghold of the anti-SDF tribal fighters led by Ibrahim al-Havel. On 3 September the SDF issued a statement declaring Ibrahim as a wanted. The statement said, "The so-called Ibrahim al-Havel, who is the leader of the sedition, is wanted by the SDF forces for causing the death of our fighters and civilians, as well as for displacing people, sabotaging civil service institutions, and leading attempts to incite sedition based on orders from external parties."

← **Post**

Farhad Shami ☑
@farhad_shami

···

تحديث

انتهاء عمليات التمشيط في بلدة الذيبان وتطهير البلدة بشكل كامل من المسلحين الدخلاء الذين فروا إلى مناطق سيطرة النظام حيث أتوا منها سابقا.

Translate post

1:00 PM · Sep 6, 2023 · **24.2K** Views

💬 31   🔁 32   ♡ 197   🔖 3   ⬆

Image 36- A screenshot of a tweet by Farhad Shami declaring full control over Dhiban town.

The same day, the same journalist posted on Facebook four images of SDF fighters in Dhiban town with a caption that read, "Dhiban town this morning", and cited Rohani TV as the source.
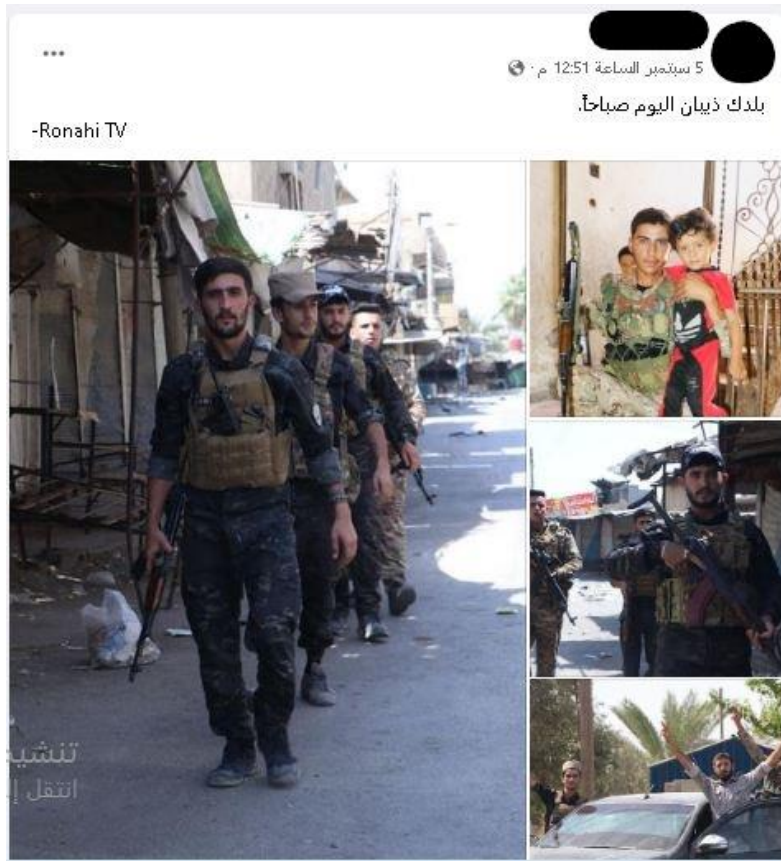
Image 37- A screenshot of the abovementioned journalist's Facebook post of images allegedly taken in Dhiban.

To confirm the validity of the post, we conducted a search for online accounts of Kurdish Ronahi TV and discovered that two of the images featured in the post were taken in al-Hawayij village near Dhiban town.

Image 38- A screenshot of one of the images published on Ronahi TV's website with claims of being taken in al-Hawayij village near Dhiban town.

Our investigation also detected a post by Farhad Shami, head of SDF's Media Center on his official account on X (formerly twitter) contained two of the images with a caption read, "Update: The village of al-Hawayij, adjacent to the Dhiban town in the eastern countryside of Deir Ezzor, has been successfully cleared by our forces. Now our forces are advancing towards the main street in the village. Four Syria regime NDF members were captured during the clashes. SDF Media Center. September 5, 2023."

Image 39- A screenshot of Farhad Shami's tweet features two of the images with claims of being taken in al-Hawayij village.

We conclude from this that the journalist deliberately published a misleading claim based on pictures taken out of their context, which may have been aimed at raising the morale of SDF supporters and presenting a narrative opposite to what was promoted by anti-SDF channels and accounts.

From Deir ez-Zor to Manbij

The scope of confrontations widened after the outbreak of new fronts against the SDF. This was due to armed men from the opposition SNA factions and Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) joining the conflict on the Manbij and Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê fronts under cover of Arab tribes. Reporting on these developments was often misleading. On 5 September 2023, local opposition pages shared a video of a bombardment with rocket launchers attached with the

description, "A prelude to organized military action begins tomorrow to control the city of Manbij."
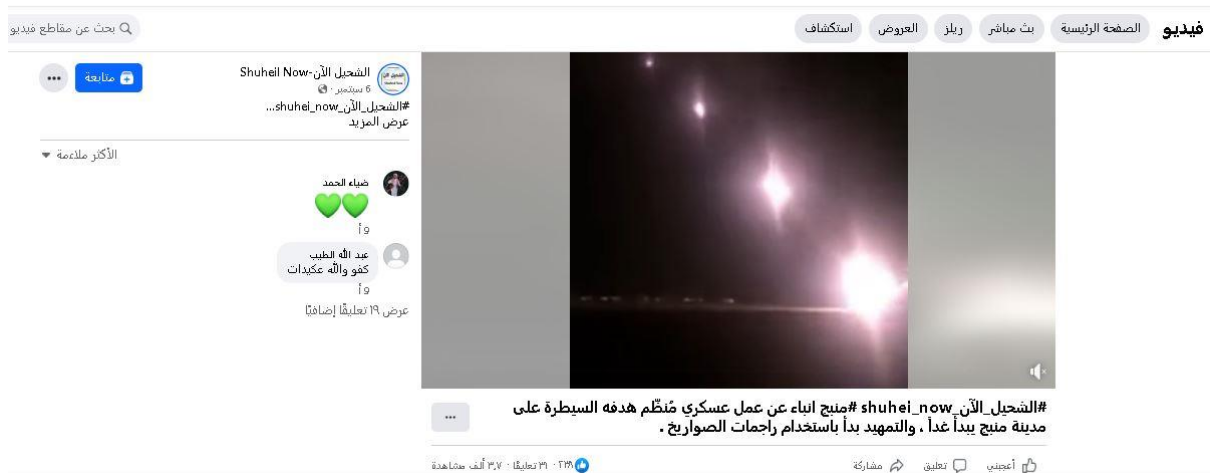

Image 40- A screenshot of a local page posted the video with a description claiming that the shown rocket launcher bombardment is a prelude to control Manbij.

Image 41- A screenshot of a local page posted the video with a description claiming that it is of a rocket launcher bombardment preluded the control of Manbij.

Notably, pages which published the video have a considerable audience, for example, Shuheil Now has 25k likes and 34k followers, Deir ez-Zor Now has 318 likes and 2.3k followers, Euphrates Voice has 6.3k likes and 11k followers, and Free Media & Exposing Corruption. Deir ez-Zor has 10k likes and 17k followers.

The research found that the video is old and was first published by Rabih Freedom YouTube Channel on 8 June 2015 with a description that reads, "Rocket launchers of the Royal Saudi Land Forces flying to hit targets of #Houthi_militias from the southern border."

راجمات صواريخ القوات البرية الملكية #السعودية منطلقة لدك أهداف #ميليشيات_الحوثي من على الحد الجنوبي
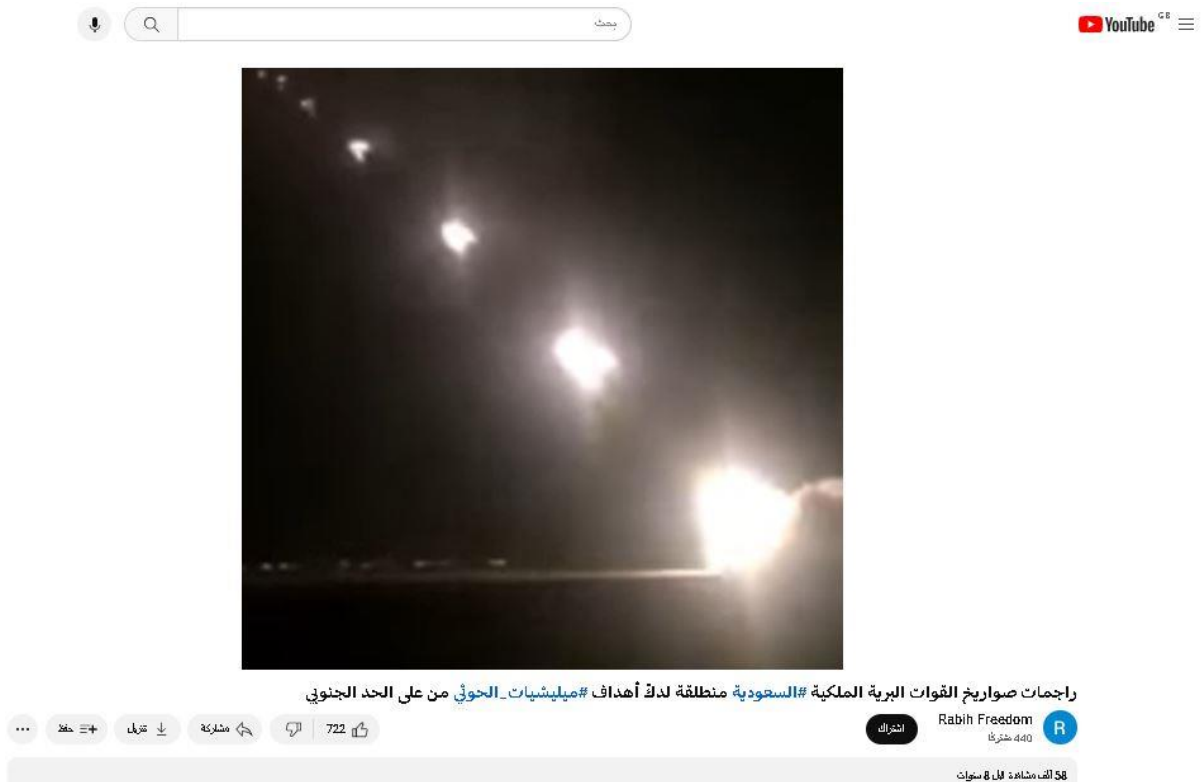
Image 42- A screenshot of a YouTube channel published the video eight years ago.

It appears that the purpose of sharing these deceitful videos is to exaggerate and create a false impression that contradicts the actual situation on the ground. It is possible that this is done to boost the morale of supporters. Interestingly, some of the accounts that posted these videos had previously shared other misleading content in the context of reporting on Deir ez-Zor unrest. It is plausible that this particular video was part of a larger campaign of misinformation.

On 10 September, public pages and personal accounts supporting tribal fighters on Facebook and Telegram circulated a video, claiming that it was of an immersion operation by Arab tribal forces against the SDF in rural Manbij, resulted in the killing of about 30 of the latter's fighters.

Upon reviewing the video, it was discovered that it was zoomed out to conceal the logo of Amjaad Media Foundation, which is affiliated with HTS. The latter was the first to publish the video on 3 March 2023 under the "short documentary" category and title "Scenes from the Qualitative Operation in Taurus Peak in Latakia."

It has been observed that the video was circulated after the situation had calmed down in the eastern part of Deir ez-Zor and the fighting had subsided. This suggests that the release of the clip may have been deliberate, with the intention of inflaming the unrest and reigniting the violence in the area.
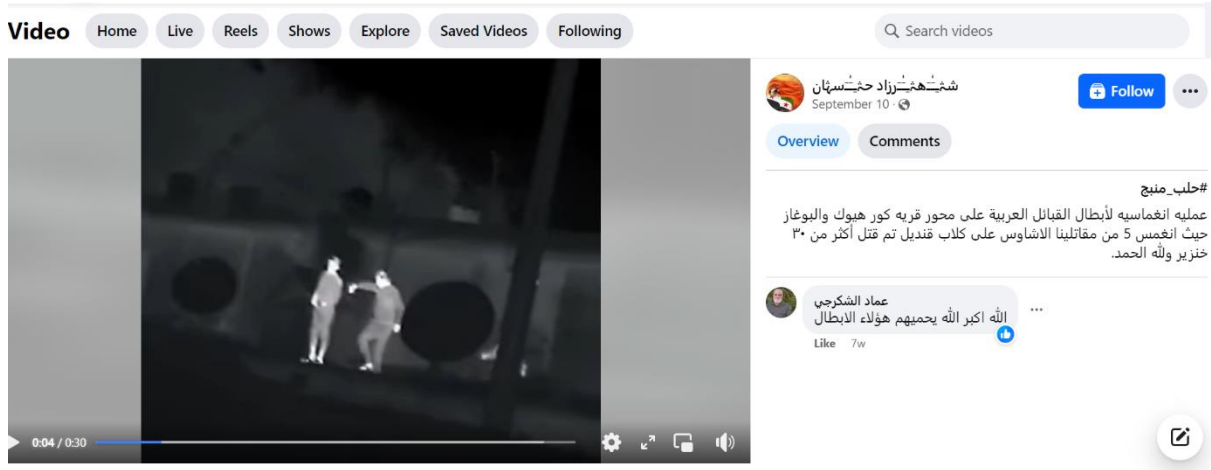
Image 43- A screenshot of a Facebook page posted the video with a description claiming it is of an "immersion operation" by the tribal forces against the SDF.

Image 44- A screenshot of the original video, which was re-circulated with claims of depicting an "immersion operation" by the tribal forces against the SDF.

From Deir ez-Zor to al-Hasakah

In a similar context, on 14 September 2023, dozens of public pages and personal accounts on Facebook circulated footage allegedly of a Kurdish official in the Trade Authority of the AANES in al-Hasakah insulting an Arab man over removing a picture of Abdullah Öcalan from near his shop.

Image 45- A screenshot of Manbij Live1 Facebook page posted the video with a caption claiming it shows an incident that occurred in the context of Deir ez-zor unrest.

The Kurdish man in the video appeared yelling racial slurs in the Sorani Kurdish dialect at a man in a traditional Arab dress.

Images 46- A screenshot of Al-Furat News Network posted the video with a caption claiming it shows an incident in al-Hasakah in the context of Deir ez-zor unrest.

Nevertheless, tracking down the video through Google and Facebook revealed that the **incident** occurred in Erbil, also called Hawler, the capital of Iraq's Kurdistan, in 2018.

Image 47- A screenshot of a Facebook account for an Iraqi person, published the video in question on 14 March 2018.

The research also found that many of the accounts and pages that reposted the video attached inflammatory phrases in the local dialect, such as: "For the Arabs of al-Hasakah to be ashamed of themselves" and "If you, people of al-Hasakah, ever have honor you must not leave a single Kurd alive today; dignity is precious, huh."

It also turned out that many of these accounts and pages that circulated the aforementioned video have already circulated news and misleading clips. Some of these accounts, which are followed by tens of thousands, used materials that urge hatred.

Image 48- A screenshot of Manbij Live 1 page on Facebook showing a video verified misleading.

Image 49- - A screenshot of a post on Al-Furat News Network Facebook page with a caption claiming to show an operation in Manbij conducted in the context of Deir ez-zor unrest.

According to the research, the "*Ajel*" Facebook page, which claims to provide the latest political, cultural and social news - eastern Syria, published a video on 14 March 2023. The video shows an official from the SDF's Trade Authority insulting an Arab man for removing Öcalan's picture from the vicinity of his shop in the city of al-Hasakah. The video was shared 39 times, out of which 25 times it was shared by a fake account named "Tala Sheikhmus." This account posted the video in multiple groups, and despite some comments pointing out that it is an old video, the account did not delete it.

It is clear that the recirculation of an old clip of a racist incident by accounts and pages on social media – some of which have tens of thousands of followers – at a time when the fighting declined in rural Deir ez-Zor, is considered a deliberate misinformation. The aim of this is to stimulate hatred between the Syrian Kurds and Arabs and thus disturb the relative civil peace in the region.

Taking Advantage of the Vulnerability of the Other Side

On 31 August, local Facebook pages circulated a photo of a young woman who sustained injuries. The pages claimed that she was a captive from the SDF held by the tribal forces in al-Busayrah town. However, investigations revealed that the image was published on the Today in Syria website in 2014, during the rule of the Islamic State over Syria's Kobanî, with the caption, "A casualty in a field hospital on the border with Turkey."

Image 50- A screenshot of the original image that was misleadingly related to Deir ez-Zor unrest.
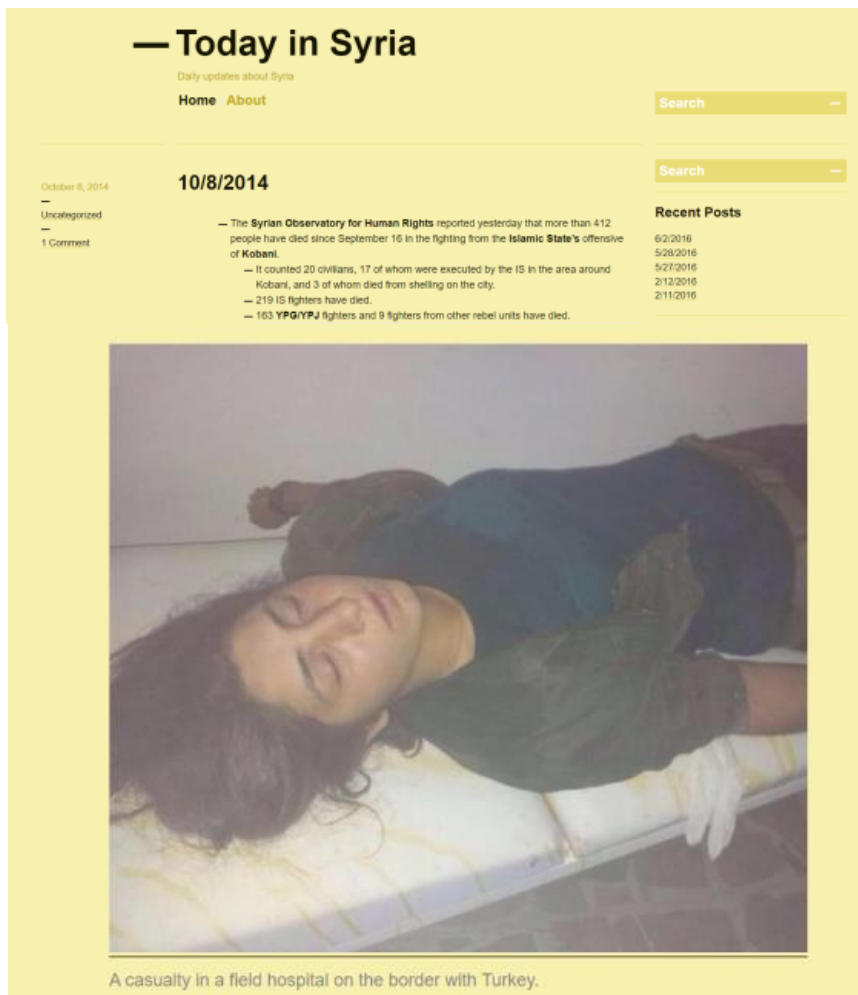

Image 51- A screenshot of the original photo, which was misleadingly recirculated in the context of Deir ez-Zor unrest.

In a similar incident, on 5 September, pro-government local Facebook pages with tens of thousands of followers circulated a video of a young Kurdish man crying and appealing to Iraqi Kurdish officials to save Rojava.

However, tracking the video revealed that it was first published on 11 March 2018 by a pro-opposition Facebook page with 56k followers concurrent with the launch of the Turkish offensive on Afrin. This suggests that the video is related to this event.

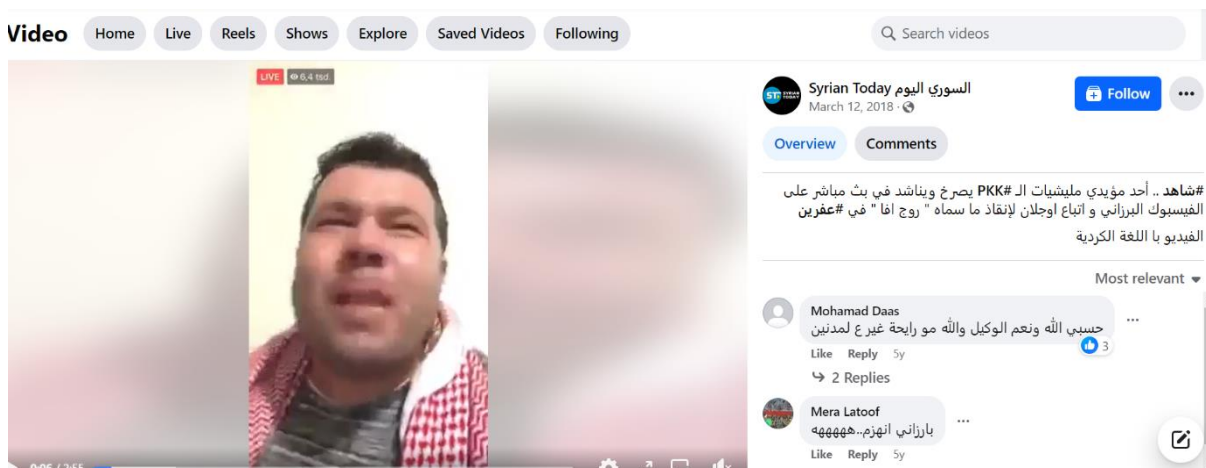Image 52- A screenshot of a Facebook page posted the video in the context of Deir ez-Zor unrest.

Image 53- A screenshot of the Facebook page that published the video in 2018.

To conclude, the impact of removing materials from their original context and altering facts is significant. The dissemination of false information about the situation on the ground poses a threat to any future efforts aimed at bridging the gap between local communities. This is particularly concerning since the recycled visual materials are built on the vulnerability of the parties involved and their ethnicity, which shows a clear bias towards one party over the other.

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

Suwar Magazine is one of the indipendent Syrian publications that appeared on August 15, 2013 as a monthly printed magazine dealing with civil affairs, freedom of expression and human rights. Is concerned with local Syrian issues and issues in an attempt to provide the public with a deep knowledge of the reality, in a professional manner, and adopts investigative journalism to convey reality and uncover violations.