



Conflicts in Deir Ezzor

Peacebuilding Endeavors from Community Perception

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**INSTITUTE FOR
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Executive Summary

The SDF-controlled areas in Deir Ezzor Governorate suffer daily conflicts because of security chaos, deteriorating local economy, and poor services. The security situation varies from one region to another. It is better in the western regions such as Al-Kasra sub-district. Security forces have been trying to reduce security instability in the governorate, but it is obvious that this has had no actual impacts in the region.

The drivers of conflict vary in Deir Ezzor, and new ones emerged after 2011. According to interviewees, reasons can be categorized into materialistic, tribal competitions, political and ideological disputes, conflict over water resources and agricultural lands, conflicts over oil resources, conflicts over the management of aid provided by the civil society organizations, drug trafficking, severe shortage of services, conflicts between residents and displaced people, conflicts caused by violations committed during different power controls of the Deir Ezzor.

Conflicts can be also classified in terms of the possibility of intervening and resolution:

Complex disputes take a long time to resolve – these include cases involving murder, revenge, kidnapping, inheritance disputes, management of oil resources, ownership of lands and real estate if too many parties are involved, honor killing, violations by ISIS, and conflicts between the local people and authorities.

More easily resolved disputes, including financial disputes, family disputes (marriage, divorce, or dowries), commercial disputes, irrigation disputes, inheritance, and traffic accidents.

Traditionally, the parties most involved in local conflicts resolution efforts have been tribal leaders and dignitaries, Imams, and educated. After 2011, new parties emerged. Tribal councils and reconciliation committees have emerged, formed by local dignitaries and

influencers and tribal sheikhs in many regions, religious committees, youth groups, well-off people, security or military leaders, and civil figures closely working with the Autonomous Administration institutions.

Civil society organizations play an important role, including providing services and humanitarian assistance along with mediating any resulting conflicts, besides utilizing relations networks, expertise, and financial support to help develop the local dialogue process.

Parties involved in local conflict resolution face many challenges, most notably: the security situation, lack of support by the local authorities, tribalism and unregulated possession of arms, lack of trust in the Autonomous Administration's institutions (courts in particular), as well as rampant corruption of these institutions.

JFL has good experience in research work and using various research tools to study subjects related to social structures. JFL has developed a special design tool that integrates the study objective model with key interviews. This approach improves the clarity of outcomes and reinforces measurement outcomes and research goals, which is finding conflict's common roots and causes of local conflicts, and the role of the civil society on resolving these conflicts. The study adopted a single research tool, which is interviews. Key stakeholders from Al-Kasra (the west countryside) and Hajin (the east country) were interviewed, and the goal was to address problems in detail. This thorough understanding requires key people with extensive knowledge of the region.

The evaluation process involved the development of the special design tool, data collection and analysis, development of findings and conclusions, writing down the social inclinations and include them in the report during a period of from February to June 2021. The evaluation process took place in Al-Kasra and Hajin towns.

Based on the findings, JFL recommends working on two priorities for future conflict resolution: the first is an emergency mechanism that can resolve existing conflicts with the contribution of influential community forces, and the second is a preventive process aimed at reducing the number and level of conflicts. Therefore, this requires improving the security situation and strengthen the local participation in decision-making as well as developing the work of the administration institutions, led by the courts.

Study's Significance and Goal

Significance

The study comes against the backdrop of increased cases of violence in the various areas covered by the study in Deir Ezzor to clarify the motives and types of conflicts and make recommendations to influential parties on intervention based on each party's capabilities and responsibilities. The study highlights the direct and indirect causes of conflicts, calls for dealing with various causes, shows the shortcomings of efforts focused solely on direct causes, and explores mechanisms for dealing with various causes as a necessary entry point to reduce conflicts and narrows their repercussions.

The participants in the study give it more importance as they are people with first-hand and detailed knowledge of conflicts in their areas, as Al Kasra area interviews were carried out by members of the Community Peace Committee, which was formed with the support of Justice for Life, and in Hajin area conducted by experienced activists. This gave more depth to discussions on local conflicts. The study's findings, recommendations and information on repeated conflicts will be discussed in panel discussions led by the members of the aforementioned Peace Committee to talk about why these conflicts are repeated and how best to intervene.

At the end of the discussions, Justice for Life expects to develop intervention mechanisms and suggestions based on the results of this study and the outcomes of the dialogue sessions.

Goal

This study is part of a collaboration between Justice for Life (JFL) and the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) in a project to promote local participation in decision-making, including peace-building efforts, local reconciliation, and stability. This is to support of the local efforts of various community groups to promote coexistence and understanding among the various parties and local groups in Deir Ezzor.

The study examines the causes, motives and most parties involved in resolving the conflicts in Deir Ezzor governorate, and the challenges that complicate the efforts to resolve and overcome them. The study illustrates the impact of the current economic and security situation on the community and its role in increasing conflicts among individuals and local groups. The study shows the types of more frequent conflicts in Deir Ezzor governorate by depending on key informants' answers and examples of conflicts in their areas. The study differentiates between more easily resolved and difficult-to-resolve disputes by identifying the circumstances and factors that complicate or ease the conflict resolution.

The study focuses on the role of civil society organizations working in Deir Ezzor governorate in contributing to conflict resolution and how the financial and human resources of these organizations can be utilized to achieve this. The study answers the following question: Have civil society organizations become a party capable of intervening and establishing civil peace? Or does its new role and work in the region require it to do more to convince the community and other actors of this role?

The study contains the recommendations of key informants interviewed by the Justice for Life team. The recommendations have clearly responded to locally preferred parties who enjoy local trust in mediation efforts. Participants recommended including the necessities of

intervention and the negatives that are reflected in society in the event of disruption of mediation sought to resolve disputes.

Introduction

In the last decade, a series of forces have controlled Deir Ezzor. In 2011, because of the massive popular uprising against the Syrian government in the governorate, the Syrian military raided the city for the first time in August 2011 to prevent peaceful protests. After few months the protests resumed and escalated after murdering several children¹ from the Deir Ezzor by Syrian government security forces. The Syrian military brutally raided the city again in June 2012 using heavy arms and airstrikes. As a result, hundreds of thousands fled the confrontations and Deir Ezzor's cities suffered massive destruction.

Then, the Syrian opposition forces, along with extremist groups, such as Ahrar Al Sham Movement and Al Nusra Front, controlled a few neighborhoods of Deir Ezzor city and countryside. In 2014, ISIS took over all the opposition areas in the province and defeated the Syrian military in 2015 and 2016. Later in mid-2017, the Syrian government forces launched a military campaign that lasted for about six months, where they recaptured² the cities³ and towns located in southern Deir Ezzor including Deir Ezzor city, Mayadin, Bukamal. As a result of military activities, waves of IDPs moved to SDF controlled Al-Hasakah and to Damascus. Later that year, with the help of the anti-ISIS coalition, the SDF

¹ JFL interviewed a witness to the murder of child Muhammad Mullah Issa in Deir Ezzor in 2018.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pI_U4rAo_Ww&t=4s

² "The Black September of Deir Ezzor", JFL, 2017.
<https://bit.ly/2WU3Guk>

³ "Deir-ez-Zor in numbers", JFL, 2018.
<https://bit.ly/3h5pTgc>

expelled ISIS⁴ from the north bank such as Al-Kasra, Hajin, Al-Sour, Al-Busera. The final pocket of ISIS in Baghuz was taken in 2019 by SDF.

The local population of Deir Ezzor suffered a decade of war. Thousands of women and children were displaced and became a victim of the indiscriminate IEDs⁵. Furthermore, families lost all their official⁶ documents⁷ such as IDs, property ownership⁸, and family documents, which resulted in many property disputes. The cities and towns of Deir Ezzor were targeted by violent bombardments⁹ that destroyed a lot of property in several regions. During displacements, hundreds of civilians were missing¹⁰ or disappeared in ISIS prisons¹¹. JFL has documented hundreds of injuries¹² during the war, and it is believed that the real numbers are greater than documented. The effects left a clear rift that scarred the social structure. As a result of the government institutions' absence, local factions from IDPs were involved in inner conflicts, that caused new disputes and brought back older ones¹³ (before 2011).

⁴ A Position Paper about Deir Ezzor by JFL, October 2017
<https://bit.ly/3wvKY9n>

⁵ "No Choices Left to Us", JFL, October 2017
<https://bit.ly/31qQ8W3>

⁶ "Loss Of Evidentiary Documents in Syria ...Awaiting Fundamental Solutions", JFL, April 2020
<https://bit.ly/3svY9o2>

⁷ A complaint to 3 of the UN Rapporteurs on Syrians losing their identification papers, JFL, October 2020
<https://bit.ly/3bVGMHI>

⁸ "Seizure of Property in Deir Ezzor", JFL, January 2020.
<https://bit.ly/3c8GgpE>

⁹ "A Voice I Can Never Forget" JFL in October 2018
<https://bit.ly/2UHV0Vi>

¹⁰ "The Unknown Fate", JFL, March 2019
<https://bit.ly/3wuiPi9>

¹¹ A letter to "The File of Detainees and Abductees Follow-up Committee in Syria", May 2020
<https://bit.ly/3vuhTK0>

¹² "Exorbitant Price of War", JFL, March 2021
<https://bit.ly/3xL5pzS>

¹³ "Deir Ezzor And Peace", JFL, October 2019
<https://bit.ly/3cKzneI>

The Impact of the War on the Frequency of Conflicts in Deir Ezzor

Deir Ezzor is one of the governorates that engaged in the popular anti-government movement in Syria in 2011, which began in the form of small demonstrations scattered in various areas of Deir Ezzor to expand rapidly and turn into large demonstrations with thousands of protestors. Several protestors were killed during attempts by security forces to disperse gatherings denouncing the authority and the Syrian president. In July 2012, Syrian forces re-entered the governorate, but more violently, with Republican Guard Units participating, killing dozens of civilians during the incursion, most notably civilians in the Al-Jura and Al-Qusour¹⁴ neighborhoods of the city of Deir Ezzor.

From the date of the second incursion until the end of 2017, government forces used heavy weapons and war jets to bomb civilian-populated residential areas. Moreover, parties to the conflict used mines in their battles, killing and injuring hundreds of residents of the governorate.

What Deir Ezzor went through can be divided into the following phases: the control of the armed opposition factions in neighborhoods in the city of Deir Ezzor and areas in the countryside, the emergence of extremist groups, that imposed their control over these areas, and the emergence of “Islamic State” (ISIS) group which in turn expanded the areas of control and imposed a suffocating siege on the neighborhoods of Deir Ezzor city between 2015 and 2017. Then, it was ended by the control of both Syrian forces on the one hand

¹⁴ Al Joura and Al Qusour, *The Forgotten Crime*, JFL, 2017.
<https://bit.ly/3ts5p6b>

and the Syrian Democratic Forces on the other over the entire governorate. This divided the governorate into two parts each under different administration. These stages have had negative repercussions on individuals, groups, and stability, as each party tries to attract local parties, which has strengthened the line-ups at the expense of local peace. The education has stopped for thousands of students, health services have declined, employment has declined, and thousands of civilians have relied on humanitarian assistance, particularly after waves of displacement, declining economic situation, the proliferation of weapons and drug trafficking, as well as the lack of a prospect for a political solution at the national level.

Community conflicts between local parties in Deir Ezzor are not new, but the proliferation of arms after 2011 and the societal division resulting from the war, political, military, and ideological line-ups have played a prominent role in exacerbating conflicts and retriggering old conflicts along with creating new outbreaks. Furthermore, violations against civilians from various parties to the conflict increased, particularly factions formed by local elements, as well as conflicts that have turned into conflict between families, clans and regions.

Conflicts have become more violent as a result of the proliferation and use of weapons without any control or accountability.

About the Implementation Areas

Located in the far east of Syria and divided into northern bank, locally known as Jazira, and southern bank, locally known as Shamiya, by the Euphrates River. Deir Ezzor is the second largest Syrian governorate of 33 thousand km² with a relatively small population of 1,206,000 residents¹⁵, according to the Syrian government's Central Bureau of Statistics in 2019. Most people live in cities and towns on the banks of River Euphrates, such as Deir Ezzor city, Mayadin, Al-Boukmal, while the rest of population live in the countryside.¹⁶ The community is tribal – based on the family as the single association between an individual and his or her environment¹⁷.

The Subdistrict of Al-Kasra¹⁸

Al Kasra is located in Deir Ezzor governorate, 40 km away from Deir Ezzor city, with a population of around 120 thousand, making it the largest sub-district in the governorate. It contains several key towns and villages: Abu Khashab, Al-Kubar, Al-Harmoushieh, Al-Kasra - Al-Ali, Al-Sawa, Zughayer Jazira, Al-Hawaij, Muhaimidah, Sefirah Fawqani, Jazirat Al-Milaj, Jazarat Abu Hamid, and Jazirat Abu Shams.

In 2017 the subdistrict received the largest number of IDPs from the government-controlled areas. There is a camp in Abu Khashab village supervised by the Autonomous Administration and many humanitarian organizations such as Bluemont and Concern Worldwide, as well as some additional camps in the villages of Muhaimida, al-Hawaij, and

¹⁵ According to the 2019 civil census of the Syrian government's Central Bureau of Statistics
<http://cbssvr.sy>

¹⁶ The population has not been precisely measured recently in the city and the countryside because of the massive displacement into the east bank of the Euphrates (so-called Jazira region).

¹⁷ Tribes' members in Deir Ezzor from stability to revolution, dynamics of conflict and factors of civil peace, JFL - July 2017.
<https://bit.ly/3pZA0q5>

¹⁸ Location of Al Kasra district, in western countryside of Deir Ezzor
<https://bit.ly/2TEOoI4>

Zughayer. There is also a public hospital in the center of Al-Kasra, mainly supported by Relief International, besides two other private hospitals in Muhaimida and Jazrat al-Buhamid villages. Al-Kasra has electricity supply for nearly two hours a day. Otherwise, locals rely on electricity generators 14 hours a day with a relatively expensive cost at 8,000 Syrian Lira amp/month. Semi-functional water pumping stations are based in: Al-Kobar, Hammar Al-Ali, Al-Zughayr, Al-Hawaij, Al-Hasan, Jazrat Al-Buhamid, and Jazrat Al-Milaj.

The Subdistrict of Al-Hajin¹⁹

An administrative subdistrict to the east of Deir Ezzor governorate 250 km² area, 110 km far from the governorate center. The population is 110 thousand²⁰. It has 6 private hospitals and 3 water supply stations fully functioning. Yet, the subdistrict has no electricity. Therefore, people rely on electric generators 8 hours daily.

¹⁹Location of Hajin district, in eastern countryside of Deir Ezzor
<https://bit.ly/3q29PPM>

²⁰ Census of residents and IDPs in Al-Kasra and Hajin, according to local and global organizations till early 2021.

Security Situation in the Target Areas

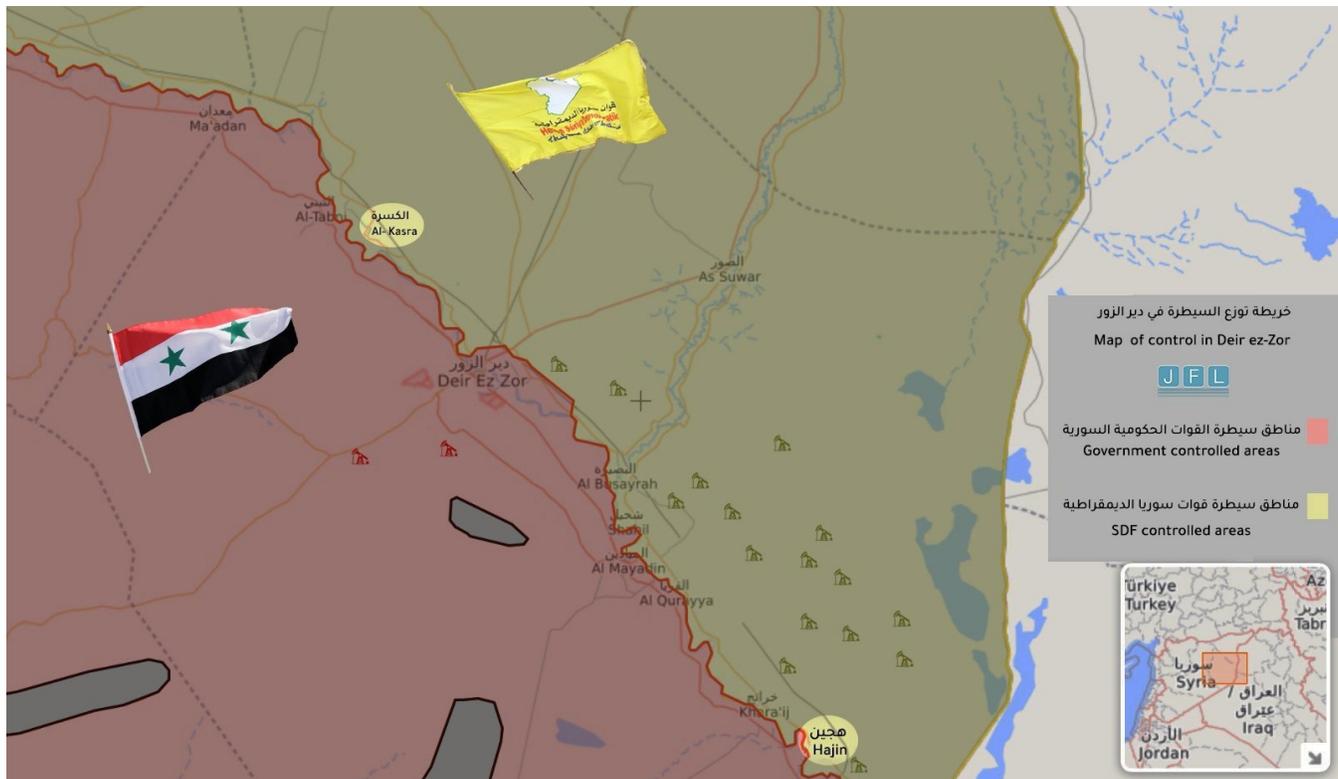
Regional security is very fragile. Security gaps²¹ led to increasing in crimes, robberies, extortion, and kidnappings. ISIS claims responsibility for some of them, while the other criminals often remain unknown. The interviewees report that local gangs have grown over the years. Unregulated possession of arms is prevalent, as well as drugs. Some participants considered the institutional corruption of the security forces as the main cause.

The security forces connive and sometimes get involved in those activities, for example, some members get involved in drugs and other activities.

These agencies are widely accused of carrying out raids to loot properties. In addition, local conflicts have increased the chaos and becoming even harder to solve.

Some people in Al-Kasra confirmed that the western countryside's security situation is relatively better than the SDF-controlled eastern countryside, or the Syrian government held areas. On the other hand, some participants appreciated some improvement and argued that the SDF security forces made efforts to restore stability after the widespread assassination action.

²¹ Deir Ezzor: Dozens Arbitrarily Arrested during SDF's "Deterrence of Terrorism" Campaign, JFL, 2020. <https://jfl.ngo/en/deir-ez-zor-dozens-arbitrarily-arrested-during-sdfs-deterrence-of-terrorism-campaign/>



Moreover, they suggested that the security gaps do not affect regional security. Notwithstanding, all participants acknowledged that security forces should do more to maintain security.

Methodology

JFL has good experience in research work and using various research tools regarding social structure subject. JFL has developed a special design tool that integrates the evaluation objective model with key interviews. This shortcut improves the clarity of outcomes and reinforces measurement outcomes and research goals, which is finding conflict's common roots and causes of local conflicts.

Spatial and Temporal Frameworks

The evaluation process involved the development of the special design tool, data collection and analysis, come up with the findings and impressions, writing down the social tendencies and include them in the report during a period of from February to June 2021. The evaluation process took place in Al-Kasra and Hajin towns.

The Research Tool

The report adopted a single research tool, which is interviews. Key people from Al-Kasra (the west countryside) and Hajin (the east country) were interviewed, and the goal was to address problems in detail. This thorough understanding requires key people with extensive knowledge of the region. The questionnaire consisted of 12 open-ended questions about classifying conflicts to simple or complex to resolve. The survey presents different parties and tests their capacity to conflict resolution and challenges. Finally, the evaluation details three specific conflicts that can be solved and the contribution of civil society in supporting the resolution parties.

The Research Sample

The interviews involved key informants including local authorities' officials, civil activists, NGO workers, community actors, residents from Al-Hol Camp, and intellectuals. Additionally, the sample has balanced representations from the host community and IDP community. A total of 80 people were interviewed: 50 from Al-Kasra and 30 from Hajin. The participants are well aware of their traditions and local conflicts. All participants are active in their region, well regarded and have a wide social network. Two participants have deep connections with the local authorities. One of them is a community headperson and

the other one is a member of the village parliament. They understand the suffering of people and social conditions and they try to use their network to help their communities. Due to cultural sensitivity in interviewing women in this region, we couldn't manage to involve women and girls in this sample; the research team was advised to respect the current local traditions.

The Research Team

For sustainability and benefit, the interviews were conducted by members from the Community Peace Committee²² in Al-Kasra district in Deir Ezzor governorate, which JFL helped form earlier after deep research covering most of Deir Ezzor region. Interviews in Hajin were conducted by local activists.

JFL facilitated the training process of interviewers, including the local activists, on how to conduct interviews and how to be mindful of people and their opinions

Challenges

The research team experienced many difficulties, including:

- The accelerating spread of Corona Virus during interviews. Many researchers lost their beloved ones, and it shifted the work.
- Some people from the sample dropped out and refused to share information with the researchers, who attributed that to frustration of security and economy.

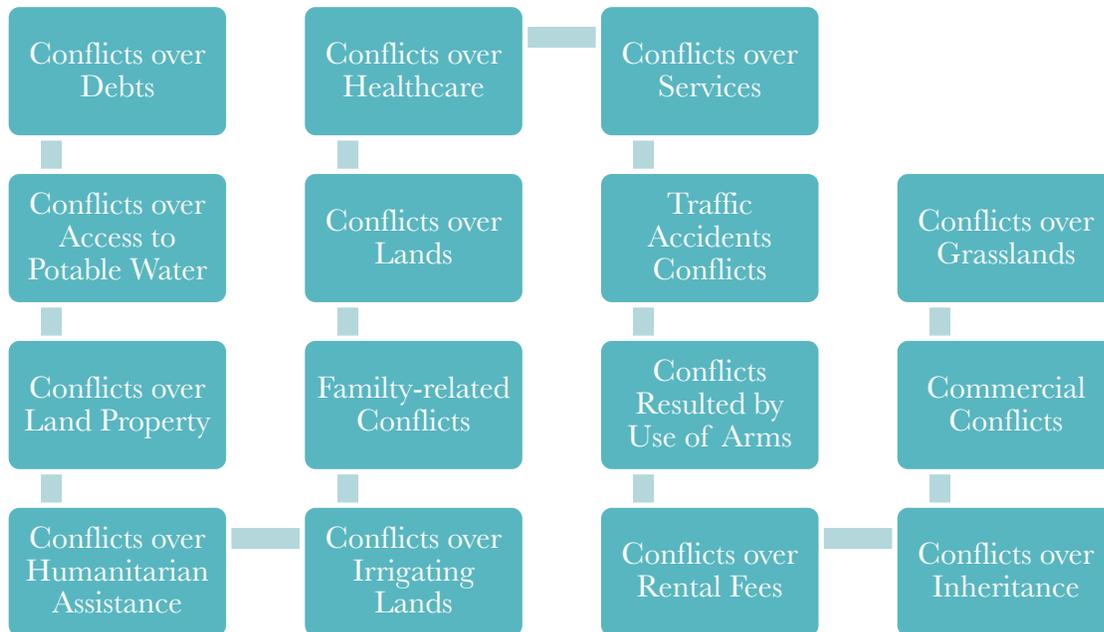
²² To learn more about the committee, please see the below link:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xiA_cQhIXGM&t=483s

- Security complications in targeted areas led to limitations on mobility and delayed many interviews. At the time of conducting the interviews, many incidents of killing and brawls happened.

Interviews Findings

About Conflicts in Target Areas

The Most Common/Frequent Conflicts



Conflicts around Deir Ezzor break out for different reasons. According to interviews conducted by JFL, the recurrence of conflicts is a result of failure to deal with their roots. Unregulated possession of arms leads to casualties during conflicts. Loss of property ownership documentation or neglecting landmarking causes families, neighbors, or tribal disputes.

Throughout meetings, JFL found 15 different common and frequent conflict categories in Deir Ezzor.

Debts Conflicts	<u>1st Example:</u> a conflict in Al-Kushkiya between a creditor and a co-worker borrower who failed to pay back on time.
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	<p><u>2nd Example:</u> a conflict in Gharanij village between two over a large disputed debt. The creditor rejected to be paid back in Syrian pound after the collapse of exchange rate. If he accepts Syrian pound, he loses so much money.</p>
<p>Conflict Resulted by Lack of Access to Drinkable Water</p>	<p><u>For example:</u> dispute in Al-Kushkiya between residents and officials from the Autonomous Administration because drinking water doesn't reach every house in the village. As officials don't supply necessary fuel or power to water stations.</p>
<p>Conflict Resulted by Land Ownership</p>	<p><u>1st Example:</u> a conflict in Gharanij over a quarry mine between the landowner and someone forcefully controlling it using his power and influence.</p>
	<p><u>2nd Example:</u> an attempted control over rain-fed lands in Abu Hamam village in the desert by influential people to deprive the locals from it.</p>
	<p><u>3rd Example:</u> someone exploits his influence in the Autonomous Administration to sell public domain lands, without referring to the rest of his brothers.</p>
	<p><u>4th Example:</u> someone sold his shops, and after a while he wants his shops back and to receive his money back. Buyers refused.</p>
	<p><u>5th Example:</u> before 2011, someone in Deir Ezzor countryside paid a contractor total 2 million Syrian pounds to build two apartments. The contractor couldn't complete construction due to war. When the war was over, the customer wanted the apartments, but the contractor says the previous payment is no longer enough to finish construction.</p>

Conflicts over Humanitarian Aid	<u>For example:</u> a conflict between a displaced person and a distribution staff in Gharanij, as the staff bullied the beneficiary and denied him aid delivery.
Conflicts over Irrigation Lands	<u>1st Example:</u> a conflict in Al-Kesh'kiyah among farmers, after one of them violated time-schedule of irrigation. The conflict shutdown the association of agricultural and irrigation lines, which prevented other farmers from watering their lands.
	<u>2nd Example:</u> Irrigation water was cut off in a village by the head of the Farmers Association. Farmers had to dig a well to complete the farming season.
Family Conflicts	<u>1st Example:</u> someone in Al-Kesh'kiyah beat his younger brother's wife, her family intervened, and family issues escalated
	<u>2nd Example:</u> brawl of two brothers in Al-Kushkiya after the older hit the younger.
	<u>3rd Example:</u> in Deir Ezzor countryside, a disagreement between an expat husband and his wife was reported, as re-divorce continued despite local mediations.
Conflicts over Borders of Agricultural Lands and Lands in the Desert	<u>1st Example:</u> a landowner accused his neighbor in Al-Kashkiya of trespassing on his land boundaries.
	<u>2nd Example:</u> three neighboring villages disputed over cultivation of a land in the near desert, as each village claims it excluding the other two.
Conflicts over provision of healthcare	<u>For example:</u> dispute in Gharanij between residents and local hospital staff after someone was seriously injured in a traffic accident and died in the hospital. The family of the deceased held the medical staff responsible for his death.

Conflicts over Provision of Services	<u>1st Example:</u> a conflict in Gharanij between residents and the Civil Council, as it executed a streets-lighting project in some parts of the village, excluding others.
	<u>2nd Example:</u> neighborhood dispute over power supply from a generator, some people refused to pay their monthly subscription fee.
	<u>3rd Example:</u> a conflict between two neighboring villages over the construction site for a water station. Each village demanded that the station be installed on its lands.
Conflicts due to Traffic Accidents	<u>1st Example:</u> a resident child in Hajin was injured in a traffic accident, where a displaced person ran him over and caused him bruises and fractures.
	<u>2nd Example:</u> a 12-year-old was run over by his friend with a motorcycle. The accident left the boy with different body injuries.
Chaotic Use of Firearms	<u>1st Example:</u> neighbors disputed in Hajin due to chaotic wedding shootings as empty projectiles fell on neighbors' houses.
	<u>2nd Example:</u> two tribes disputed while distributing humanitarian aid, and the conflict escalated to the use of firearms and injuring one person.
Conflict over Property Rental	<u>For example:</u> a conflict between a landlord and a tenant after raising the monthly rent. The tenant rejected the raise and refused to leave the house.
Inheritance Conflicts	<u>For example:</u> a group of brothers refused to give their sister her share of inheritance despite repeated requests.
Commercial Conflicts	<u>For example:</u> the cost of foodstuffs has increased on a major distributor in Al-Kushkiya, which raised selling prices to merchants who objected.

<p>Conflicts over Grazing Lands</p>	<p><u>For example:</u> territorial conflict between shepherds after someone entered someone else's land.</p>
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Most Complex Conflicts



Murder, revenge, and kidnapping are the most complex conflicts in the region, and they take a long time to resolve, according to most participants. These conflicts span for years and are passed on from one generation to the next. What makes it even more difficult to combat those conflicts are local customs, lack of authorities' intervention or accountability for crimes perpetrators, and unregulated possession and use of arms.

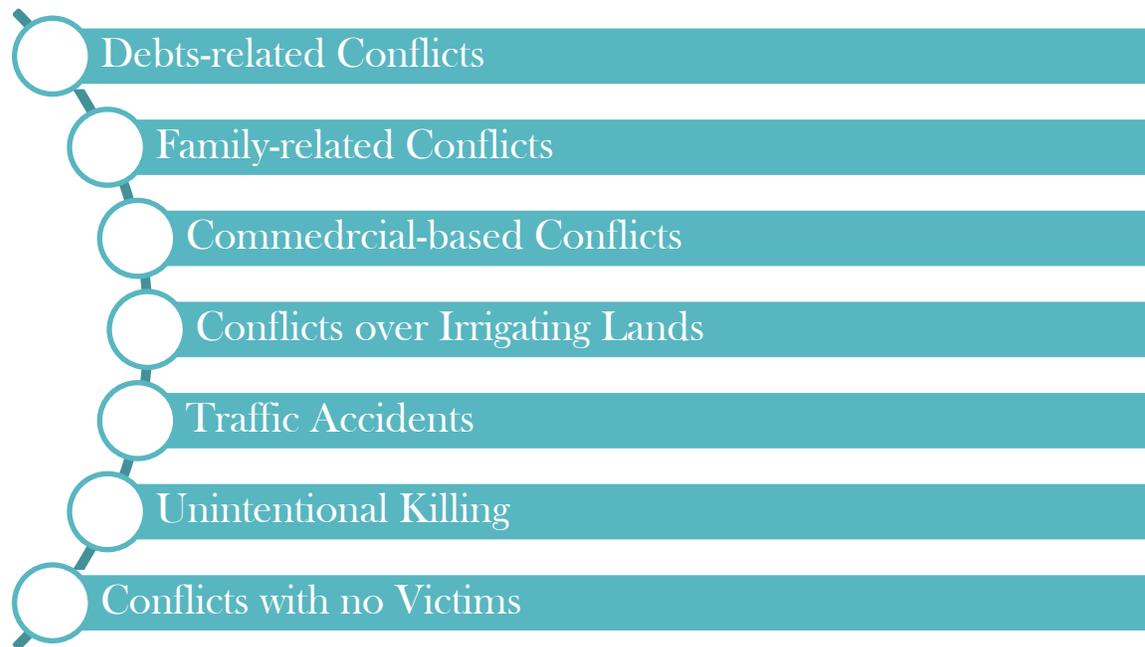
While other conflicts are considered solvable such as inheritance, management of oil wells, ownership of agricultural land, and real estate yet, they are still complex due to the multiplicity of parties involved. Honor killing issues are considered very sensitive, and they are often not amenable to a peaceful resolution. All aforementioned issues are further complicated by the absence and displacement of competent human resources that would have contributed to a solution and the failure to implement local agreements by dignitaries who are subject to their children's aggression to gain power and control over their parents, which was not very common before.

Some participants believe that political and ideological conflicts are sometimes complex, as each party stick to their opinion without tolerating others. The researchers explained this as a result of long-term freedom suppression in the region.

A participant mentioned that the region suffered a great deal of negative influence during ISIS control as local ISIS elements committed widespread violations. That resulted in interchanging regional disputes among people. Some of those disputes are still waiting for a solution while others got resolved by local dignitaries, such as reconciliation between a wounded person, who got shot by an ISIS combatant who died later during battles, and the combatant's family and according to which the family compensated the wounded financially in return to settle peace.

Finally, disputes between local people and local authorities are also considered complex. Those conflicts erupt as locals reject some of the authority's measures and demand change by protesting peacefully or blocking streets. However, authorities respond with repression, contributing to local tensions between the two parties, as authorities are in complete denial of popular demands.

Most Easy-to-resolve Conflicts



The most easy-to-resolve disputes requiring less time are debts disputes, and family-related disputes such as marriage, divorce, dowries, or raising children. In terms of financial debts disputes, usually, the family of the borrower party raises funds to pay off. The solution-difficulty criteria set up by the participants to distinguish the intensity of a conflict are argument, brawl, no use of arms or casualties, different involvements for a solution either by families, neighbors, or dignitaries to some extent. According to these criteria, local authorities shouldn't be required for a solution to be considered "solvable."

1st Example: A dispute among customers queueing on ice-cubes factory. The factory owner organized the queue and supervised the distribution.

2nd Example: Two cars crashed in the central market of Al-Kesh'kiyah village without causing damage. A few people were present in the scene solved the problem.

3rd Example: A school dispute between a teacher and the principal over management position. Both had to take a competency assessment test, and the job went to whoever passed the exam.

Commercial disputes over prices and irrigating queue disputes can be handled by the manager of regional commercial and agricultural associations. Moreover, inheritance disputes between brothers and cousins or traffic accidents can be resolved in a short time by dignitaries or families.

Example: A 7-year-old girl died in a car accident in a village west of Deir Ezzor. The conflict was resolved according to local customs.

Accidental or unintentional killing.

Example: A boy lost his life during medical treatment. The boy's family accused the doctor and pharmacist of being responsible for the death. The case was resolved by paying compensation money, or what is locally called "blood money." On the other hand, conflicts with no casualties like in weddings or markets can be resolved quickly. For example, a brawl between two tribes took place in Muhaimidah village without any casualties. Some land disputes and real estate are also considered easy because not so many parties are involved, including a dispute over purchase of a motorcycle, or driving too fast with motorcycles, disputes over raising birds, or bread queues on bakeries.

Reasons of Conflict

Most interviewees said that after 2011, conflicts increased, and motives changed. Before that, the Syrian government enforced laws and authority and prevented any power or resources competitions. The government closely monitored agricultural disputes. The Syrian regime's security grip caused public fear, reduced conflicts, and enforced security.

After 2011, other forces have controlled Deir Ezzor, and ever since, the security situation deteriorated. Organized crime rates skyrocketed besides kidnappings and extortion, and sleeper/secret cells which always cause security challenges. The revenge tradition and

unregulated possession of arms came back to the surface. Conflicts over financial resources have increased, such as oil and civil organizations' leadership and the resources allocations.

While no system or faction could restore security, older disputes re-emerged, such as land or real estate disputes.

Many educated local emigrated, who have influence on the local community. On the other hand, some extremists clashed with other religious or non-religious groups, which sometimes turned into an armed conflict. The new economic conditions and stress formed new grounds for conflicts, besides the widespread drug trafficking. The local authorities could not meet people's needs. Disputes over bread or fuel broke out and older conflicts repeated from the time when other factions controlled the region. The parties of older conflicts took advantage of the security chaos and the widespread unregulated arms possession. Similarly, successive waves of internal displacement to Deir Ezzor have also led to conflicts over resources and humanitarian aid. Displacement is one reason for the local conflict. The waves of displacement led to increasing prices for rent and the prices of housing and commercial real estate. Additionally, the lifestyle gap between the displaced and the host communities caused other conflicts.

Two people stated that there is no significant change in conflicts motives compared to before and after 2011. However, they acknowledged the state of insecurity comes as an environment for increasing pace of conflicts.

[The participants recognize conflicts in their areas and connect them to four reasons:](#)

Financial Reasons

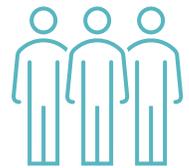
Some local parties try to control oil and gas revenues besides the distribution of humanitarian aid. Constrained debts and the increase in dollar exchange rate led to high prices, which caused many conflicts and low employability rates, scarcity of financial resources, and limited mobility for work, especially after Covid-19



pandemic. Many sellers terminated old closed real estate contracts with customers, demanding returning their property ownership. All of this caused an unfair competition over limited resources. The decline of the economic situation has split society into two groups: the rich and the poor. Inequality reflected double rates of crimes such as robberies or armed robberies. On the other hand, land property prices have risen over 100 times, while equity owners benefited from this increase at the expense of the limited-income individuals.

Tribal Competitions

Tribespeople are often involved in competing for power and influence for governmental posts, real-estate, projects, or contracts. Furthermore, tribal support is a key factor in seizing such opportunities, which bring even more power at the expense of others. Many officials use their positions to serve the interests of their tribe and help other members of their tribe access more privileges. The security gap has revived old conflicts and revenge killings. Additionally, the tribal involvement in the Syrian civil war has intensified tribes' conflicts.



Ideological and Political Conflicts

Some political parties in the region support the SDF; others are pro-Syrian regime besides some pro-Syrian opposition and hardliners Muslim radicals. The lack of services, security, or economic stability has fueled even more disagreement between political parties. Essentially, when a dignitary²³ gets assassinated, parties start to blame each other. Additionally, there are sectarian disagreements between Sunni and Shia Muslims in the western countryside, instead the Autonomous



²³ Implications of Fragile Stability and Human Rights Violations, JFL, 2020.
<https://jfl.ngo/en/implications-of-fragile-stability-and-human-rights-violations/>

Administration imposed some rules that are considered traditionally inapplicable to local population.

Water and Agricultural Disputes

The Euphrates region is rich in arable lands. Disputes erupt between local powers over more rain-fed lands to gain influence. While drinking and irrigation water isn't enough for the local population besides disorganization of the irrigation process, which causes more intense disputes between farmers. It's worth mentioning the Euphrates water level has shifted down recently, and local powers started fighting over gravel quarries.



Intervention and Mediation Efforts in Resolving Conflicts

The Most Intervening Parties, Groups, and Individuals Who are Capable of Mediation

Regional dignitaries
and tribal sheikhs

Local Authorities

Clerics and Imams

Merchants and
well-to-do people

Civil Society
Organizations

The term “Arefa” is locally used to describe those familiar with local customs, such as tribal dignitaries and imams. On the other hand, intellectuals are the most involved in resolving regional conflicts because they have the most contact with people. Intellectuals are considered familiar with various problems and are experienced in handling them. Some outsiders or regional dignitaries and sheikhs are usually contacted in disputes between different regions or different tribes.

For example: In the village of Al-Kashkiyah, there is a reconciliation committee consisting of tribal sheikhs that take the initiative to resolve disputes in the village.

Intervention to resolve disputes is not limited to a particular person or a party. In some disputes, traditional parties are unable to reach an acceptable solution. However, understanding a dispute in detail can guide anyone close to conflicted parties to solutions. For example, a classmate or business partner who can influence. Clerics and imams influence people through knowledge and social network.

For example: A 70-year-old land dispute in west Deir Ezzor was finally resolved by dignitaries.

In the west countryside, there is an allegedly small role of civil society activists and organizations in peacebuilding. Sometimes they intervene because they have communication networks, relations, and capabilities to bring parties together. For example, Local organizations and groups facilitated a meeting in Zughayer village to discuss a conflict in the area. The meeting took place at the headquarters of a local organization.

After 2011, many parties emerged and contributed to conflict resolution. Dignitaries and tribal councils represent the most influential party after the security and service vacuum in the region. Reconciliation committees that were formed in villages or sub-districts have an influential role in societal building peace. For example, Al-Kushkiya’s reconciliation committee, village’s notables and IDP notables, plays a major role in maintaining stability.

Teachers and doctors also gain people's trust and reputation besides some local officials from local authorities, which serviced people. According to some of the participants, security forces and some military commanders, in addition to religious committees from local authorities, have a role in conflict resolution due to their power and ability to bring parties together and impose solutions.

Furthermore, businesspeople such as well-off people or merchants contribute to conflict resolution via financial support when necessary. Newly formed youth groups offer conflict resolution initiatives concerning closer family circles.

Tribal sheikhs, dignitaries, tribal councils, and peace committees enjoy people's respect for their expertise, reputation, and initiative to resolve disputes. Although local communities submit to customs in dispute resolution, dignitaries seek local authorities' support to implement agreed solutions and prevent any escalation. Outsider dignitaries also enjoy people's respect under tribal customs because they are often impartial and far from conflict sensitivity. They help in mediating some disputes.

According to some participants, all the parties that emerged after the year 2011 contribute to the traditional parties who have known people. Local authority's role is temporary and unfeasible, either civil or military, and it is very similar to previous forces that controlled the region. Nevertheless, after the absence of those forces, conflicts re-emerged almost immediately because of imposition of unjust solutions that society never accepted.

In addition, people turn to some dignitaries close to local authorities in some conflicts because people accept and respect them or because they have connections with the authorities. The researchers of JFL found from interviews that civil society organizations have a limited role in several issues.

The Role of Civil Society Organizations in Resolving Conflicts in the Targeted Regions

Civil society organizations have a direct or indirect role in conflict resolution and local peace-building endeavors. Most of the key informants spoke about the role of civil society. Some think they have a large and active role, while others believe it is partial and insufficient. The role of organizations, according to the key informants, is summarized in providing services whose deficiency causes many conflicts, including paving roads, water stations' maintenance and water supply, providing electric generators, supporting municipalities and agricultural associations, providing aid fairly to all those in need, and establishing vocational centers.

During the past three years, many organizations have formed peace committees composed of local dignitaries. The mission of these committees was to intervene and to resolve local conflicts. Civil society holds intellectual workshops and seminars and raises community's awareness on human rights and local peace, bringing together various parties and providing them with the space for dialogue. The civil society can expand their role by responding to various needs in the region, especially education, health, and livelihoods, or by relying on people who are familiar with local conflicts and how to handle them.

For example: some organizations sponsored production of bread, while others supported farmers associations by fixing engines and water lines which mitigated the problem.

Thus, some key informants think that some dignitaries or influential people exploit civil society organizations to serve their narrow personal interests. Similarly, some organizations try to improve their relationships with dignitaries to boost their network and secure local acceptance. Sometimes these actions violate the civil society's principle of neutrality, and it could even turn them into a conflict party.

Some key informants did not see any role for civil society organizations. According to these interviewees, they are neither experienced nor qualified to engage in disputes. Capable of resolution parties are known and most of conflicts are referred to them. This opinion is based to the new presence of civil society organizations and the local loyalty to social norms and traditions related to conflicts resolution. Some participants think the role of organizations is limited to addressing and investigating conflicts through site visits. This study spots on conflicts to encourage resolution efforts.

Intervention Objective and Challenges Faced by Mediating Parties

Objectives

Non-escalating of
conflicts from personal
to tribal

All parties get their
rights

Preserving social
relations

Non-developing conflicts

- Non-escalating of conflicts from personal to tribal.
- Every party gets their rights without discrimination among society, especially between residents and displaced people.
- Preserving social relations. Family disputes, property, or inheritance disputes are among the most damaging conflicts to social relations.
- Presence of local customs in responsibility to conflict resolution helps resolve as many problems as possible before they escalate.

Challenges

Among the main challenges facing conflict resolution parties in the region:

- Security chaos and economic deterioration cause more conflicts or re-emerge more ones and slow down resolution efforts. Conflicts that are not resolved might generate further conflicts.
- Local authorities don't support local resolution efforts and neglect to develop them.
- Tribal fanaticism and unregulated possession of arms especially among youth.
- Local traditions pose a challenge in some cases, such as revenge and honor killing, where the solution options are limited.
- Lack of money impedes financial compensations in case of murder or traffic accidents.
- Lack of confidence in justice represented by Justice Diwan²⁴. People think that judges lack experience, laws aren't binding, and the number of courts isn't enough.
- Corruption in local security forces challenges resolution efforts and local authority intervention.
- Some conflict parties are protected by their tribes which prolongs resolution.

²⁴ It is considered as a primary court resolving civil, criminal, and legal cases. Check out JFL's report in the link below for more information about the judicial structure in the Autonomous Administration regions, "Prosecuting ISIS elements: essential steps to achieve justice." <https://bit.ly/2R9qzr8>

JFL Recommendations

To the Autonomous Administration

1. Improving security immensely contributes to handling local conflicts and their repercussions. Achieving stability is not limited to security and military aspects but also by resolving the causes of insecurity and security absence.
2. Authorities must deploy legislations to regulate possession of arms as the proliferation creates conflicts, and some are not easy to resolve.
3. The role of police and courts must be activated through developing the skills and capacity of officials and cadres. The current situation of these institutions does not allow them to deal with the increasing conflicts. Moreover, these institutions were not able to enjoy the community confidence.
4. Encouraging local participation in decision-making process by holding broad and binding consultations led by local authorities assisted by civil society and local dignitaries in all areas, including all social groups. This process should cover different regions and components. The objective of consultations is to suggest a viable mechanism contributing to effective local participation in decision-making. Dealing with the deep roots of conflicts requires wide and effective participation by community in local administration as it has the best knowledge and ability to identify those reasons and suggest more real solutions.
5. Counter corruption in the Autonomous Administration institutions by establishing effective transparency and accountability mechanisms. Corruption has been leading to many conflicts. Corruption can be noted during employment, services provision,

- and humanitarian aid provision. Powerful people make use of the local authorities' support to violate laws.
6. Regional, ethnic, and religious equality mitigates the causes of some conflicts such as in employment, receipt of aid, or monopoly of markets.
 7. Integrity and fair distribution of natural resources reduces resource conflicts, which have been disputed over since 2011 till now.
 8. Building all projects of the autonomous administration depending on the local needs. Some projects provide invaluable assistance for the target groups. Some groups are targeted by multiple projects, whereas other groups are not targeted by any project.
 9. Support local reconciliations mechanisms, including compensation payments "the blood money." This kind of support makes it an obligation to submit to peaceful means of resolution.
 10. Monitor local markets and standardize the prices to mitigate the conflicts over financial debts and stop monopolization of prices.
 11. It must be obligatory in civil written contracts or transactions to specify the currency in which the transaction is conducted. This contributes to alleviating disputes related to real estate, rentals, and debts disputes.
 12. Support the role of civil society in responding to local needs. The support should not be limited to services, but also it should consider ongoing fieldwork on peacebuilding and facilitating local dialogues.

To Civil Society Organizations

1. Reinforcing civil society's community peacebuilding programs and increasing dialogue spaces, as those spaces have a vital role in bringing the parties to conflict together and discuss the potential solutions.
2. Focus on broader participation in peace-building activities whose outputs should be presented to donors and local authorities to improve intervention processes.

3. Assistance in forming reconciliation committees in villages and subdistricts for more participation to build local stability.
4. The mechanisms of providing services and distribution of humanitarian aid must be transparent to avoid any conflicts.

Recommendations on the Intervention of Civil Society Organizations

The interviews demonstrated that civil society organizations have the capacity to become a key player in resolving certain local conflicts. They could help in resolving major conflicts by supporting local endeavors. Civil society is experienced in implementing services projects, distributing humanitarian aid, need assessments, facilitating dialogues, launching, and coordinating advocacy campaigns.

JFL recommends several interventions to prevent potential conflicts by dealing with their causes and to mitigate the impact of the existing ones:

1. Launch a local advocacy campaign that promotes the value of neutralizing public utilities during disputes and not disrupt or harm them. Water and power stations, agricultural associations, schools, hospitals, clinics, and other facilities whose suspension would damage hundreds of homes and thousands of families. These utilities must be protected in the first place and by everybody.
2. Launch a legal awareness campaign to the public on the necessity to settle public domain lands, as it's a widespread dispute that could be resolved consensually. It is also possible to raise awareness on keeping the ownership documents or obtaining lost documents.

3. Launch a wide local discussion campaign to resolve family disputes like marriage, divorce, and dowries within the frame of family. This could prevent such disagreements from escalating into tribal conflicts.
4. Perform accurate services need assessment in different regions and involve local communities in assessment, planning, and implementation. This assessment should be submitted to donors and city councils of the Autonomous Administration.
5. Launch an advocacy campaign to raise awareness against chaotic misuse of firearms. The goal is to encourage the community to avoid firearms and call on the local authorities to regulate the possession of arms.
6. Launch an advocacy campaign on traffic accidents by raise awareness of safety rules and urge the community to abide by them. The campaign should call on the local authorities to take this issue more seriously.