

An Incomplete Return to Al-Lajat

09-06-2021

In early June, dozens of displaced people returned to their homes in the villages of Al-Shiyah, Al-Shomareh, Al-Alali and Al-Mudowareh in the Lajat area in the western part of the Suweida governorate. The Lajat largely consists of grey, volcanic rock with scattered patches of arable land.

A security source told pro-regime media that the returns were coordinated by “competent authorities” in Suweida governorate, as well as the Russian Reconciliation Centre for southern Syria, and that work was ongoing to facilitate returns for remaining displaced residents. The source claimed there was heavy damage to homes and infrastructure due to clashes with “terrorist groups” that had previously been present in those villages. He added that the priority now is to restore services to the villages so that returning families can settle once again and engage in economic activity, especially breeding and raising livestock.

There were multiple waves of displacement from Al-Lajat in recent years as various militias took control of local villages. Among these groups was the Islamic State and Jabhat Al-Nusra. Kidnapping gangs and drug and weapons traffickers have also been active in the area. All remaining residents left Al-Lajat after the regime retook control of the area in 2018 through a reconciliation agreement that extended across the south. Pro-regime Syrian and Iranian militias subsequently took up military positions in Al-Lajat, bulldozing many villages and towns in order to set up military training sites and weapons depots. They took advantage of the area’s rugged terrain, which includes natural caves that can be used for protection from Israeli aerial bombardment.

The villages of Al-Shiyah, Al-Shomareh, Al-Alali and Al-Mudowareh faced heavy damage, and as a consequence no longer have basic services such as electricity, drinking water and sewage. Displaced families had hoped to return after their villages were rebuilt and infrastructure repaired. However, this has not happened. Furthermore, some villages in Al-Lajat remain under the control of Iranian-backed militias, most importantly the village of Hawsh Hamad, which was bulldozed in its entirety after regime forces destroyed it in 2018.

According to a correspondent for *The Syria Report*, this month’s returns were the result of an agreement between the Russian Reconciliation Centre and the Russian-backed Eighth Brigade of the Fifth-Corps, which controls the city of Bosra Al-Sham in the western part of the Daraa governorate. The Eighth Brigade includes fighters from displaced Bedouin tribes of Al-Lajat. Talks over allowing the returns took more than three years, as Iranian-backed militias refused to withdraw from some area villages. The Syrian regime also repeatedly disrupted the talks and delayed returns, with the aim of pressuring some young men displaced from Al-Lajat into joining the army in exchange for allowing their families to return home.

A previous agreement in January 2021 between Russian forces and the Eighth Brigade allowed the [return](#) of some displaced people to the villages of Ibb, Assem and Al-Najeih, which had remained under Hezbollah control from 2018 to 2020. However, returnees to those villages faced security harassment and detainment at the hands of the Eighth Brigade.

Destruction in the Lajat

The Syria Report



Source: Lajat Press

Copyright ©2001-2021 The Syria Report - all rights reserved. Your use of this Web site is subject to our legal terms & conditions