

Russian Jets Kill at Least 25 in Northwestern Syria

By [Reuters](#)

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Aerial strikes on Monday killed at least 25 people, mostly civilians, in northwestern Syria in the sixth week of a Russian-led military offensive that has so far killed hundreds of civilians, according to residents and civil rescuers.

They said warplanes flying at high altitude, which monitors said were Russian Sukhoi jets, dropped bombs on the village of Jabala in southern Idlib province, with rescuer teams so far pulling out 13 bodies, including women and children.

Russian jets were also behind several raids that hit the town of Khan Sheikhoun, Kfar Batikh and several other villages that left at least another 12 civilians dead, according to another local rescuer.

Rescuers say the major aerial campaign that Moscow has thrown its weight behind since it

was launched in earnest at the end of April has killed over 1,500 people with more than half of the death toll civilians.

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Residents and local and international aid agencies that support the rebel-held areas say the sustained campaign that has bombed schools and knocked down medical centers was to smash the spirit of civilians in opposition areas.

More than 300,000 people have fled the frontlines to the safety of areas near the border with Turkey, U.N. and aid agencies say.

The Russian-backed offensive has so far failed to make major inroads into rebel territory in northern Hama and southern Idlib provinces, where mainstream rebels backed by Turkey alongside jihadist fighters are putting up fierce resistance in their last remaining bastion in Syria.

Russia and the Syrian army deny allegations of indiscriminate bombing of civilian areas or a campaign to paralyze everyday life in opposition-held areas and say they are fighting al-Qaeda-inspired Islamist militants.

Moscow blames the rebels for breaking a truce by hitting government-held areas and says Turkey has failed to live up to its obligations under a deal brokered last year that created a buffer zone in the area that obliges it to push out militants.

Civilians in rebel-held areas, where many oppose returning to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's one-party rule, look to Turkey which has steadily built up a military presence in the area as a protector against the Russian-led strikes.

Northwest Syria - including Idlib province and parts of neighboring provinces - has an estimated 3 million inhabitants, about half of whom had already fled fighting elsewhere, according to the United Nations.

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