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Weekly coverage round-up (May 13 - 17)

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Al-Jumhuriya Collective



A quick English summary of our Arabic news coverage this week.

“Implementing Astana, or torpedoing it?” (13 May, 2019). The military campaign waged by the Assad regime and its Russian backers continues in Syria’s Idlib and Hama provinces, with seemingly little international action to stop it, even at the merely rhetorical level. It remains unclear whether the regime has only modest territorial gains in mind for now, or whether the campaign will transform into an all-out battle to retake the entire provinces from opposition hands. Equally, it’s far from clear if the operations are part of a tacit agreement between the so-called Astana powers (Russia, Turkey, and Iran), as some analysis has postulated, or are instead the result of a dispute between them. For more, see our [full report](#) (Arabic).

“The error needed to keep the show going” (14 May, 2019). A recent play put on at Berlin’s English Theatre, “Please, repeat after me,” by the playwright Ziad Adwan, challenges stereotypes about Syrian refugees in Europe. The play uses the device of an apparent technical error that prompts the actors to improvise in partnership with the audience, creating a sense of equality between them, and blurring the lines between reality and fantasy in a manner reminiscent of Syrians’ own experiences in the past eight years of revolution and war. For our full review of the play, see [here](#) (Arabic).

“Beyond battlefield maps, a profound frustration” (15 May, 2019). The latest round of violence in Idlib and Hama provinces has instilled a profound frustration in millions of

Syrians around the world; a frustration going beyond the specifics of which village or town has been retaken, and beyond even the horrific bloodshed and destruction that have become almost unremarkable in their regularity. This frustration is produced by factors including but not limited to the impunity with which the Assad regime and its allies get away with their war crimes; the apparent international indifference to Syria as a whole; the impotence of the official Syrian military and political opposition in the face of incomparably more powerful state actors; and the seeming improbability of anything resembling a happy outcome on the horizon, even after eight long years of terror and misery. For more, see our [full article](#) (Arabic).

“The compounding catastrophe of Syria’s internally displaced” (16 May, 2019). Over a quarter of a million Syrians have been displaced from their homes this month alone by the violent campaign waged by the Assad regime and Russia in Idlib and Hama provinces, according to a humanitarian activist on the ground with whom Al-Jumhuriya spoke. The number climbs daily as the bombardment continues. These internally displaced persons (IDPs) are largely settling in the countryside of neighboring Aleppo province, in camps already brimming with refugees and unable to absorb more people, or else out in the open, in fields and olive groves. Al-Jumhuriya spoke to IDPs who said they are receiving no help whatsoever from anyone. For more, read our [full report](#) (Arabic).

“‘Extras’ in horse-riding celebrations” (17 May, 2019). Students at Damascus University tell Al-Jumhuriya of their humiliation at being forced to attend and applaud enthusiastically at horse-riding competitions in which the children of the Assad family participate. According to these students, officials at the university threatened them with the loss of their dormitory accommodation if they didn’t attend, and even dance and sing in the stands, under the gaze of Baath Party student members watching over them to ensure compliance. The same students were later obliged to attend demonstrations staged by the regime in Qunaitra and outside the UN offices in Damascus. For more, see our [full report](#) (Arabic).