



Genocide Alert: The Syrian Arab Republic

October 2015

Genocide Watch is issuing a genocide emergency alert for the continuing crisis in Syria. Both the Syrian state and at least three other groups are committing genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes daily. All four entities must be defeated militarily and their leaders should be tried for their crimes. The four warring forces include: the al-Assad regime and its allied militias; the Free Syrian Army; Jabhat al-Nusra; and ISIS, sometimes called the Islamic State.

The al-Assad Regime

During the Arab Spring in Tunisia and Egypt, pro-democracy protests erupted in Syria in March 2011 and quickly proliferated throughout the country. The Assad regime responded with a brutal crackdown on the peaceful protests, including mass killing of demonstrators. The Syrian air force bombed and Syrian armed forces shelled Sunni Muslim cities and towns, intentionally targeting hospitals, schools, and markets. The Assad regime abducted and tortured political prisoners. It used rape as a weapon of war. Men and boys were arrested and “disappeared.” Sunni cities were deprived of food and medical services.

According to Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, the Syrian government continues to use chemical weapons, ballistic missiles, cluster munitions, incendiary weapons, and “barrel bombs” on civilians in residential areas. This is in direct contravention to UNSC Resolutions 2118 and 2209 pertaining to the elimination of chemical weapons in Syria. The regime uses a “starve-or-surrender” siege strategy: starving entire populations, depriving them of medical assistance and obstructing access to humanitarian aid to force them into capitulation.

The Assad regime employs torture and rape as its official strategy for submission. Perceived opposition supporters, activists, journalists, humanitarian assistance providers, lawyers, doctors and health care workers are targeted and regarded as “terrorists” by the regime. Arbitrarily arrested political prisoners are subjected to prolonged beatings using batons and wires, electrocution and use of battery acid, pulling of fingernails, suspension by limbs, sexual abuse, mock executions, and murder in detention. In August 2014, Human Rights Watch reported an estimated 85,000 political prisoners in Syria abducted in conditions that amount to enforced disappearances, in violation of UNSC Resolution 2139 and international human rights law.

Despite the regime’s atrocities, Assad has die-hard supporters from his ruling minority Alawite sect. Faced with the threat of al-Nusra and ISIS jihadists, some Christians and Druze also support Assad, as a lesser evil. Assad is financially and militarily supported by Russia and Iran and diplomatically by China. Lebanese Hezbollah Shia militia and the Iranian Revolutionary guard have also joined the fighting in support of Assad.

Russian Air Force bombing of rebel forces has reinforced Assad, and makes imposition of a no-fly zone to stop Syrian bombing of civilians nearly impossible without Russian assent.



The Free Syrian Army

Government opposition fighters organized themselves into rebel brigades in response to the escalating brutality of the Assad regime. At the forefront of the opposition movement is the Free Syrian Army (FSA). The FSA abducts, tortures, and murders government sympathizers. It uses child soldiers, mutilates captives, and attacks Shiite villages in Lebanon.

Jabhat Al-Nusra

Al-Qaeda affiliate, Jabhat al-Nusra has held territory in northern Syria, but has now withdrawn in the face of Turkish invasion of the region. Al-Nusra and ISIS actively oppose each others control, but both are jihadist. Both al-Nusra and ISIS claim responsibility for terrorist suicide bombings targeted at civilians.

ISIS

ISIS has now extended its control across the northern and eastern regions of Syria. ISIS is a greater threat than al-Nusra, because of ISIS's millennialist ideological appeal to young Muslims around the world. ISIS intends world conquest, just as another totalitarian ideology, communism, did. Like communism, it cannot be defeated by military force alone.

ISIS rules the territory it controls through terror. It publicly beheads Shia Muslims, Christians, Yazidi and other non-Muslim men. It has a policy of systematic rape and forced sexual slavery of non-Muslim women. It actively recruits young Muslim men and women from around the world. According to a report by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), ISIS has killed 1,362 Syrian civilians from June 2014 to April 2015 and recruited at least 400 child soldiers since January 2015.

The Syrian Humanitarian Crisis

The power struggle between factions in Syria has resulted in a war of attrition. It has produced the largest refugee exodus of any conflict in the world. A 2015 report by UNHCR estimates 4.2 million Syrian refugees, 7.6 million internally displaced, 12.2 million in critical need of humanitarian assistance and 420,000 civilians living under siege. Of the vulnerable population in need of humanitarian aid, 5.6 million are children. 250,000 Syrians have died in the conflict.

Massive destruction of essential infrastructure such as schools and hospitals has generated deteriorating health conditions and disruption of education. The Assad regime's denial of medical care, along with the detention, torture and execution of healthcare workers has reduced any ability to protect civilian health. Opposition groups' takeover of schools for use as training barracks and arms and explosive storage has further paralyzed Syrian education. ISIS abductions of children have rendered schools too dangerous to attend. The UN estimates that nearly half of the youth population, three million Syrian children, are out of school with only six percent enrolled in the most war-torn zones.

The collapse of Syria's social, health and welfare systems is compounded by serious economic collapse. As of March 2015, the UN reports an aggregate economic loss of \$202 billion since the



eruption of the conflict, with four out of five Syrians living in poverty. Incessant government obstruction of humanitarian access to internally displaced civilians and civilians under siege greatly exacerbates the humanitarian crisis in Syria. It is a war crime.

International Response

Despite the urgency of confronting the Syrian crisis, the UN, US, Russia and European leaders remain deeply divided on Syria, forestalling any feasible and effective resolution. The mass influx of Syrian refugees into neighboring countries— Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt, and now into Europe— continues to strain domestic and regional resources. Iraq, Jordan and Turkey have imperiled incoming refugees by establishing strict border controls and preventing refugees from taking asylum in contravention of the *non-refoulement* obligations of international law.

United Nations Security Council, General Assembly and Arab League attempts to broker peace negotiations have all failed. The internationally supported 2012 Geneva Communiqué, calling for the creation of a transitional governing body in Syria through mutual consensus, has yet to produce any tangible outcome. In 2014, UN Special Envoy to Syria, Staffan de Mistura, orchestrated “Geneva II,” bilateral peace talks between the Assad regime and opposition groups. Negotiations failed after only two rounds due to the regime’s refusal to concede to opposition “terrorist” demands.

In 2011 and 2012, Russia and China vetoed three UNSC resolutions demanding accountability for mass atrocity crimes in Syria. In 2013, the General Assembly passed a consensus resolution on Syria and extended the mandate for the Human Rights Council to conduct investigations of human rights violations and perpetrators. The Council Report on ISIS was released in March and stated that ISIS is committing crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide. But no action to stop these crimes has resulted.

In 2014, Russia and China vetoed a proposed UNSC Resolution to refer Syria to the International Criminal Court, a recommendation that was sponsored by 60 countries, 100 nongovernmental organizations and 13 of the 15 Council members. The UNSC succeeded in passing Resolutions 2118 and 2209 demanding elimination of chemical weapons and indiscriminate attacks on civilians in Syria. The UNSC also passed Resolutions 2191, 2139, and 2165, which underscored the government’s responsibility to protect its people and called for increased humanitarian assistance and unimpeded access to these services. The Assad regime remains blatantly in violation of all of these UNSC Resolutions. ISIS has now begun to use chemical weapons, as well.

Syria has become a proxy war reflecting the schisms in the regional and world order. Russia and Iran provide military and financial assistance to the Assad regime. The US, UK, France, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other Arab Gulf states support the opposition. The growing threat of ISIS’s genocidal totalitarianism might unite even these mortal opponents.



Genocide Watch declares that the crisis in Syria stands at *Stage 9: Extermination* on four fronts: the Assad regime's politicide; the Free Syrian Army's war crimes against government sympathizers; al-Nusra's crimes against humanity; and ISIS's genocidal atrocities toward religious minorities and non-Sunni Muslims. All these parties must be defeated militarily and put on trial by the International Criminal Court, a new International Criminal Court for the Middle East, or national courts.

Genocide Watch recommends:

- After careful coordination with Russia, the US, NATO and the Arab League should impose a no-fly zone over all of Syria.
- Targeted financial and travel sanctions should be imposed on leaders of the Syrian government, the FSA, al-Nusra and ISIS.
- The Syrian government, Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS should be referred to the International Criminal Court for their genocidal massacres, crimes against humanity and war crimes, including the use of chemical weapons.
- If referral to the ICC is blocked by Russian or Chinese veto, the Arab League should create an International Criminal Tribunal for the Middle East.
- Lebanon, Turkey, Egypt, Iraq, and Jordan, should comply with international law and allow Syrian refugees asylum. The wealthy nations of the world should fully support Syrian refugees until they can return home.
- The UN, US, Europe and Russia should create an emergency humanitarian relief operation to all areas of Syria. The Syrian government must permit unobstructed humanitarian aid access to all vulnerable populations.
- The UN Security Council should enforce UNSC Resolution 2178 and establish counter-terrorism measures to block the recruitment, organization, movement and mobilization of ISIS, al-Qaeda and their affiliates.

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