



Aleppo Under Fire

“Special Report 1”

A special report displays the key events in Aleppo city. It documents the violations taking a place in the Eastern neighborhoods in Aleppo between 19 and 28 September 2016. It also provides a quick evaluation on the humanitarian and educational situation in the besieged neighborhoods. This report monitors the public mood as well as it provide a scenario regarding the humanitarian situation in accordance to the degree of violations occurring in the city along with the actors’ behavior.

Background: key events in the city of Aleppo

Aleppo is divided between three controlling factions: the Syrian government and its militias, the armed opposition, and the Kurdish People’s Protection Unit (YPG). Eastern Aleppo is controlled by the armed opposition, western Aleppo is controlled by the Syrian government, and the YPG controls the Sheikh Maqsd district and parts of Ashrafiyah.

Events began with the taking of Castello Road by the Syrian government on July 17, 2016 followed by their control of the Bani Zaid region, leading to the complete siege of neighborhoods in eastern Aleppo. This led to a military campaign from the armed opposition aiming to break the siege of the city’s eastern neighborhoods, beginning with a battle to control Ramusa Road. In order to succeed, the armed opposition had to control the entire road, military colleges and the “1070” residential housing project. However, the eastern neighborhoods fell back under siege after the Syrian government gained back control of the military colleges during the truce.

By the time the truce agreement started on September 12, 2016, Aleppo registered the highest level of infractions compared to all of the other Syrian governorates. No humanitarian aid entered, despite being specified in the truce agreement and the aid trucks being ready on the Syrian-Turkish border.

Violations following the end of the truce

The city of Aleppo has been witnessing a violent attack since the Syrian government declared the truce to have ended on September 19. Violations started just two hours after the declaration of the end of the truce with the targeting of the Red Crescent in Urm al-Kubra, destroying 18 aid trucks and inflicting 15 casualties, among them workers and volunteers in the Red Crescent. This attack was followed by the declaration of a battle for Aleppo by the Syrian government in order to control the eastern neighborhoods controlled by the opposition.

The battle entailed the use of all types of weapons on civilian areas, resulting in a tragic situation and leading the Aleppo local council to declare eastern Aleppo an afflicted city.

The Civil Defense has documented 1,700 air strikes with different types of weapons: 19 air strikes with thermobaric (vacuum) missiles which penetrate military bunkers and destroy civilian buildings and shelters; 231 phosphorous raids; napalm; and cluster bombs. The main areas targeted were:

- Sakhoor district, targeted by phosphorous and cluster bombs with more than 10 raids, inflicting 20 casualties.



- Shaar neighborhood, where vacuum missiles were used with 15 raids inflicting 15 casualties. On September 27 the area was again targeted with vacuum missiles, inflicting at least 30 casualties (and the number continues to increase).
- Old Aleppo recorded more than 10 raids that inflicted seven casualties.
- Bustan al-Qasser and Kalassa districts (which are the most affected) were exposed to 50 raids using phosphorous and vacuum missiles, resulting in huge destruction and inflicting more than 100 casualties.
- Mashhad neighborhood witnessed five raids with vacuum missiles that inflicted 10 casualties. In addition, white phosphorous was used, causing fires and resulting in tens of injured.
- The rest of the raids took place in the other areas of Aleppo.

Death & Injured Toll

The death toll between the period from 19 to 28 September reached 416, including 107 children and 79 women. These were the numbers at the time of writing; it is possible they have increased. More than 1,700 injured were registered. The targeting was not limited to residential neighborhoods, but also included public facilities. Three Civil Defense locations in besieged Aleppo were documented as targeted, putting two them out of service. These were: Ansari Center and Hanano Center.

Medical Situation

The city is witnessing an acute shortage of ambulatory medicine, and an almost complete lack of the medication for diabetes, blood pressure, dialysis and asthma patients in the eastern districts of the city. Hospitals did not survive targeting, which appears to be a systemic policy of the military raids; Omar Bin Abed al-Azez and Zarzoor Hospitals were hit, as well as the ambulance unit of the Civil Defense which is now out of service. In addition, two hospitals of Doctors Without Borders (M2 and M10) were hit on 28 September, and they are now out of service in the Old Aleppo area and Bab al-Hadeed.

Humanitarian Relief

The amount of relief is not sufficient for less than ten percent of the inhabitants, and it is only enough for less than two weeks. Markets witness an almost complete lack of the basic foodstuffs resulting from the siege on the eastern areas.

The situation of bakeries is extremely bad, with bread only being distributed twice every week, the portion for every family six loaves per distribution. The reason for this is lack of flour and diesel to turn ovens on. Bakeries have also been targeted; on 28 September a bread distribution center was hit in the al-Madee area during working hours, which caused 22 casualties. Almost none of the bodies were recognizable because they were completely destroyed. There were also a huge number of injured. An ambulance team who came to rescue the injured was targeted, and the whole ambulance team were also killed.

Basic Services

The water pumping station in Bab al-Nairab was hit, resulting in its complete destruction, and stopping water flow into the eastern neighborhoods. In addition, the main sewer lines were destroyed in al-Shaar and Old



Aleppo. The electricity conversion station of al-Zerbee was targeted on 22 September, with the shelling leading to technical damage in the electricity transformation lines. The most important of these was the main electricity line supplying Sulaiman al-Halabi Station, leading to the obstruction of water pumping in all the neighborhoods of Old Aleppo.

Education

Schools are in a complete paralysis at the beginning of the scholastic year. The Jabal al-Sheikh School in the Salah al-Din neighborhood was targeted and destroyed. A barrel bomb was recorded at 10 o'clock AM on 28 September, targeting Irteqa School and killing the administrative staff that was present, as well as completely destroying the school.

General public mood

Civil activists have launched a campaign on social media called "Holocaust Aleppo", referring to the massacres committed by the military raids on more than 350,000 civilians besieged in Aleppo.

In the shadow of this attack and the increasing of violence and shelling targeting civilians, Syrians are feeling rage and frustration. This is also the result of the absence of any practical steps from the international community towards what is happening in Aleppo. This rage has started to become despair towards the international community and the Friends of Syria countries, after the violations and attacks on Aleppo have continued - even after the Security Council session focusing on Syria.

This is a very serious warning sign of a new attitude that has started to take shape among Syrians, who are beginning to think that the international community is unfair towards protecting civilians. This attitude has reached its peak, and many are even saying that the international community is a participant in shedding Syrian blood, and that it is the international community that gives the green light to kill Syrians because of its silence about these crimes.

Possible Scenarios

Aleppo is considered the core issue influencing the international balance, particularly in regards to finding a solution or a settlement for the Syrian issue between the most important international players, which are the United States and Russia. For more than two years, bargaining for the city has continued before every negotiation round because of considerations relevant to its location, its size (it has the second largest population of any city in the country), and because of its symbolic morale.

Ironically, this international bargaining is conducted over civilians who are paying the highest price. What happened in Aleppo is another clear example of this. Below we explore three possible scenarios that could occur, based on the assumption that ending the suffering of Syrians in the city of Aleppo must begin with an American-Russian agreement to find a solution and implement it.



First scenario: American-Russian ceasefire agreement without engaging local factions

This scenario will relieve the suffering of civilian residents. Its main disadvantage is that, whatever emerges from the agreement, it will be fragile and unsustainable if local factions are not involved in applying it. Moreover it will have a negative impact rather than a positive one as long as the terms of the agreement are not clear and specified to the public; the Americans and Russians are those who monitor its implementation rather than the United Nations or any third party; and it does not lead to steps towards a political solution between the two main parties.

The second scenario: American-Russian agreement with the engagement of local factions

This scenario will be relatively sustainable, applicable and more realistic, and it will positively affect the whole negotiation process. It will revive Syrians' faith in the international community, which they have lost after the volume of violations without any tangible steps on the ground to reduce suffering.

The third scenario: disagreement between the United States and Russia

In this case we three scenarios will be faced:

Scenario 3a: The Syrian government controls eastern Aleppo

This will lead to the probability of a high level of violations being committed, which could reach the level of war crimes based on former experience of the Syrian government's behavior, and based on the propaganda circulated by the government, as well as considering the sectarian nature of the allies fighting on the government's side. These include the Nujaba militias in addition to local militias such as the al-Quds Brigade. This control will lead to a crisis in the political situation and will cut any road towards a political solution. It will also affect issues in other locations in Syria, which could lead to worsening the humanitarian situation in other areas, which has already happened in, for example, the Damascus Suburbs (Muadamia, Qudsaiya and Ghouta) and in neighborhoods of Homs.

Scenario 3b: Lack of armed control on the ground in eastern Aleppo with continued aerial bombardment

This will lead to an increasing in the number of casualties due to shelling and destruction of facilities such as hospitals and Civil Defense centers. It will also result in the continuation of the siege, lack of ability to deliver humanitarian aid, lack of food, bread and fuel needed to run bakeries. The medical situation is likely to deteriorate, resulting in a lack of ambulatory materials and medicine for diseases such as diabetes and cancer, as well as insufficient medical staff to address the increasing need. Epidemics are likely to spread as the result of the targeting of sanitation and clean water facilities. There is likely to be a huge amount of infrastructure destroyed. On the social level, there could be increasing rates of radicalism with the absence of an international deterrent to this attack, as well as deepening social rifts between eastern and western Aleppo. On the military level, the more mixing that occurs between armed opposition groups classified as moderate and those classified as non-moderate will be reflected in international lists.



Scenario 3c: The opposition advances and breaks the siege on Aleppo

This will lead to the movement of displaced people from western Aleppo, and a high level of violations based on former experience of the Syrian government forces' behavior after their taking of the "1070" residential neighborhood and their treatment of the people there. This will push the Syrian government and its allies to enter a negotiation process to form a political solution. This will play a role in pushing avoid repeating what is happening in Aleppo in other areas of the country. However, this option will depend on the opposition forces' movement to break the siege.

In summary, reviewing the former scenarios: the international community and strong states, particularly the United States and Russia and the permanent members of the Security Council, have the responsibility for what is happening in terms of the violations that are becoming humanitarian crimes in the city of Aleppo.