“WAR OF ANNIHILATION”

DEVASTATING TOLL ON CIVILIANS, RAQQA – SYRIA

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

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Cover photo: *Raqqa's residents surveying the destruction in the city centre.*
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MAP

RAQQA
Fayad family
Hashish family
Analysis Extent
Aswad family
Badran family
Euprates River
Damage or destruction
0
1
2
Kilometers
N
Source: UNOSAT damage density data from satellite imagery acquired on 21 October 2017

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

> **"I don't understand why they bombed us… Didn't the surveillance planes see that we were civilian families?"**
>
> Rasha Badran, air strikes survivor

The four-month military operation to oust the armed group calling itself Islamic State (IS) from Raqqa, the Syrian city which IS had declared its capital, killed hundreds of civilians, injured many more and destroyed much of the city. During the course of the operation, from June to October 2017, homes, private and public buildings and infrastructure were reduced to rubble or damaged beyond repair.

Residents were trapped, as fighting raged in Raqqa's streets between IS militants and Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) fighters, and US-led Coalition's air and artillery strikes rocked the city. With escape routes mined by IS and the group's snipers shooting at those trying to flee, civilians fled from place to place within the city, desperately seeking refuge or escape. Some were killed in their homes; some in the very places where they had sought refuge, and others as they tried to flee.

Shortly before the military campaign, US Defense Secretary James Mattis promised a "war of annihilation" against IS, signalling an increase in intensity in the US-led Coalition's military campaign against the group. The impact on civilians was devastating.

Amnesty International researchers travelled to Raqqa in February 2018 and spent two weeks visiting 42 locations of strikes and interviewing 112 witnesses and survivors. The organisation analysed satellite imagery and reviewed other publicly available material. This report documents the experiences of four families whose cases are emblematic of wider patterns.

The cases provide prima facie evidence that several Coalition attacks which killed and injured civilians violated international humanitarian law. Although IS exacerbated the challenges inherent to urban combat by operating amongst civilians and using them as human shields, their tactics were known well ahead of the Raqqa campaign. Coalition forces did not take adequate account of civilians present in the city and failed to take the precautions necessary to minimise harm to civilians and civilian objects.

The Aswad were a family of traders who had worked all their lives to construct a building in Raqqa. Some family members stayed in Raqqa when the military operation began in order to protect their property, seeking shelter from the shelling in the basement of their building. On the evening of 28 June 2017, the building was destroyed by a Coalition air strike, killing eight people, most of them children. Mohammed Othman Aswad, the only survivor, told Amnesty International: *"I was sitting on an empty oil tin by the basement door chatting to Abu Mahmoud who was crouching next to me. His wife and [five] children were down in the basement with my brother Jamal… The strike came out of the blue."*

Mohammed's youngest brother, Ammar, who had previously fled the city, was killed as he stepped on a mine laid by IS when he returned to Raqqa to try to recover the bodies days later.

The Hashish family lost 18 members. Nine were killed in a Coalition air strike, seven were killed as they tried to flee via a road which had been mined by IS, and two others were killed by a mortar seemingly launched by the SDF.

"Those who stayed died and those who tried to run away died. We couldn't afford to pay the smugglers; we were trapped," Munira Hashish told Amnesty International. She and several of her children survived the air strike and the mines and eventually managed to escape *"by walking over the blood of those who were blown up as they tried to flee ahead of us,"* she said.

The smugglers – often IS members themselves – knew how to avoid the group's snipers and mines. They charged several hundreds of US dollars per person to guide civilians out of Raqqa. The price increased as the military operation progressed and IS stepped up efforts to prevent civilians from leaving the city. Unable to afford the smugglers' fees, Munira and her family attempted to leave on their own, despite the danger. She told Amnesty International:

> *We had tried to escape the city but couldn't manage it. About five days after 'Eid' [30 June/1 July 2017] we tried to flee across the river but Daesh [Arabic acronym for IS] caught us. They beat the men very badly and detained me and the other women in a house for a day before they let us go...*

In mid-July, after her husband and brother-in-law were killed in a mortar strike, Munira and her family again tried to flee. Unbeknown to them, the road they took was mined. Mohammed, 12, one of the children injured in the explosion, told Amnesty International:

> *We walked softly, softly, trying not to make any noise so that if Daesh were lurking around they would not hear us… when we got a point very close to the main road the street we were walking on was blocked by a small earth mound; we had to walk on it to pass, and when we did, the explosion happened.*

Seven were killed and the rest were injured. Most of the dead and injured were women and children. The survivors had no option but to return home. A few days later a Coalition air strike destroyed their home, killing nine members of the family, mostly women and children.

A young man holding a child staring at the ruins of bombed buildings in Raqqa. © Amnesty International

The case of the Badran family perhaps best illustrates the ordeal civilians endured in Raqqa during the military campaign. Thirty-nine family members and 10 neighbours were killed in four separate Coalition strikes as they fled from place to place, desperately trying to avoid rapidly shifting front lines and being killed and injured in the very places where they sought shelter. Rasha Badran, one of the survivors, told Amnesty International:

> *We thought the forces who came to evict Daesh would know their business and would target Daesh and leave the civilians alone. We were naïve. By the time we realised how dangerous it had become everywhere, it was too late; we were trapped.*

As the Badrans moved from neighbourhood to neighbourhood to escape the fighting, shelling and air bombardments, they came under fire from both Coalition aircraft and IS snipers, who were trying to keep civilians in areas under IS control to serve as human shields.

Moving undetected was virtually impossible for such a large group, among whom were relatives injured in an earlier strike who had to be carried. On 18 July 2017, while attempting a desperate escape from a neighbourhood under attack, nine men from the family were killed in two separate Coalition strikes. They had just succeeded in moving the women and children to another location and were on their way to join them.

A month later, remaining family members attempted to flee, only to be fired on by IS gunmen, who killed the doctor who had been providing medical care to the injured family members. The group had no choice but to turn back to the place they were escaping from. Two days later, on 20 August 2017, Coalition forces simultaneously bombed the two neighbouring houses in which the family were staying. These air strikes killed 30 Badran family members, mostly women and children. Among the dead was Rasha Badran's one-year-old daughter, Tulip. Rasha told Amnesty International:

> *… Almost everybody was killed. Only I, my husband and his brother and cousin survived. The strike happened at about 7pm. I fainted and when I regained consciousness I heard my husband's cousin, Mohammed, calling out. I could neither move nor speak. Then my husband and his brother found me. My husband was the most seriously injured [of the survivors] – he had a head wound and blood was pouring from his ears. It was dark and we could not see anything. We called out but nobody else answered; nobody moved. It was completely silent except for the planes circling above. We hid in the rubble until the morning because the planes were circling overhead. In the morning, we found Tulip's body; our baby was dead. We buried her near there, by a tree.*

The four surviving members of the Badran family kept moving from place to place, still trying to find a way to get out of the city. A month later, the four were attempting another escape from an IS-controlled area when a Coalition strike killed Rasha's brother-in-law and cousin. It took Rasha and her husband another two weeks and several other failed attempts before they were finally able to leave the city. They were the only two who made it out alive.

In the early hours of 12 October 2017 a blitz of Coalition air strikes destroyed much of Harat al-Badu, the last neighbourhood under IS control as the battle for Raqqa came to an end. Among the civilians killed in the bombardments were Mohammed Fayad and 15 members of his family and neighbours. Coalition air strikes destroyed his house and his brother-in-law's house across a narrow street. Mohammed Fayad, a man in his 80s known as Abu Saif, had refused to leave the home where he had lived for 50 years when the Raqqa military campaign began. His daughters and other relatives stayed with him. As Coalition air bombardments shook the neighbourhood during the night of 11-12 October 2017, terrified neighbours sought shelter with the Fayad family. Among them were Ali Habib and his family. He told Amnesty International:

> *I was sitting on a chair holding my little boy and the women were sitting on the floor, huddled together… I felt the roof of the house collapse on me. I could not move and my little boy was not next to me anymore… I called my wife, my mother, my daughter, but nobody answered… I realised that everybody was dead. Then my boy, Mohammed, called out and that gave me the strength to free myself from the rubble and go to him. He had been thrown some 10m away by the explosion. We were both injured.*

Later that day the SDF and the Coalition agreed a ceasefire with IS, under the terms of which IS fighters were allowed safe passage out of the city. As part of the deal, a convoy of buses arranged by the SDF took IS fighters and their families out of the city to areas east of Raqqa that were still under IS control.

To date, the Coalition has not explained why it continued to launch strikes which killed so many civilians while a deal granting IS fighters impunity and safe passage out of the city was being considered and negotiated. Many survivors of Coalition strikes interviewed by Amnesty International asked why Coalition forces needed to destroy an entire city and kill so many civilians with bombardments supposedly targeting IS fighters – only to then allow IS fighters to leave the city unharmed.

The "patterns of life" – or daily routines – adopted by civilians struggling to survive amidst a high-intensity urban conflict were not particular to Raqqa and had had long been observed in other conflicts in other countries. Civilians crowded into homes and shelters, seeking safety in numbers, moving from place to place in search of shelter, emerging suddenly from buildings after prolonged hibernation, moving around front line

areas to look for food/water. Civilians had to make fateful decisions on where to move for safety in an information blackout; they were not informed about evolving patterns of fighting because – without telephone, internet or other means of communication – they were in the dark about events unfolding around. The Coalition needed to be mindful of each of these factors affecting civilian behaviour.

In all the cases detailed in this report, Coalition forces launched air strikes on buildings full of civilians using wide-area effect munitions, which could be expected to destroy the buildings. In all four cases, the civilians killed and injured in the attacks, including many women and children, had been staying in the buildings for long periods prior to the strikes. Had Coalition forces conducted rigorous surveillance prior to the strikes, they would have been aware of their presence. Amnesty International found no information indicating that IS fighters were present in the buildings when they were hit and survivors and witnesses to these strikes were not aware of IS fighters in the vicinity of the houses at the time of the strikes. Even had IS fighters been present, it would not have justified the targeting of these civilian dwellings with munitions expected to cause such extensive destruction.

Entire neighbourhoods in Raqqa are damaged beyond repair. © Amnesty International

The Coalition has so far refused to even acknowledge the scale of harm caused to civilians by the military campaign. At the height of the Raqqa battle, in September 2017, outgoing Coalition commander, Lieutenant General Stephen Townsend, wrote that *"…there has never been a more precise air campaign in the history of armed conflict"*. However, this precise air campaign killed hundreds of civilians. At the same time, US Marines' activities described by Army Sergeant Major John Wayne Troxell (senior enlisted adviser to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff), suggests that the Coalition operation was far from precise: *"In five months they fired 35,000 artillery rounds on ISIS targets… They fired more rounds in five months in Raqqa, Syria, than any other Marine artillery battalion, or any Marine or Army battalion, since the Vietnam War."*

Given that standard artillery shells fired from an M777 howitzer have an average margin of error of over 100m, launching so many of these shells into a city where civilians were trapped in every neighbourhood posed an unacceptable risk to civilians. Yet despite incontrovertible evidence of civilian casualties and wholesale destruction in Raqqa, and the high level of civilian casualties, the Coalition narrative remains unchanged.

The international Coalition to defeat IS in Iraq and Syria was formed in 2014. Named "Operation Inherent Resolve", it sought to present itself as an international Coalition with broad-based support from nations and institutions around the world. But the military action it took in Raqqa against IS was an overwhelmingly US

military affair. Under the command of a US General, US forces fired 100% of the artillery into Raqqa and carried out over 90% of the air strikes. British and French forces were the only other Coalition members to strike Raqqa from the air. The SDF provided the ground troops needed to push into the city on foot and were partly responsible for locating targets for Coalition air and artillery strikes. The percentage of the Coalition air and artillery strikes that were carried out based on SDF co-ordinates is unclear, as is the extent to which Coalition forces verified targets identified by the SDF.

Eight months after military operation ended, most of the city's residents remain displaced and those who have returned are living in dire conditions among the mountains of rubble and the stench of dead bodies trapped beneath, facing the threat of mines/improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and unexploded ordnance. Virtually every resident of Raqqa who spoke to Amnesty International asked why those who could spend so much for a costly military campaign to destroy the city cannot provide the relief so desperately needed in its aftermath, including the heavy-lifting equipment needed to clear the rubble and recover the bodies and clear the IEDs.

Amnesty International calls on the Coalition and its member states to acknowledge publicly the scale and gravity of the loss of civilian lives and destruction of property and livelihoods which resulted from its strikes in Raqqa. The Coalition should also make public the information necessary to investigate responsibility for civilian losses during the military operation, including dates, times, and exact location of strikes, which forces carried them out, as well as weapons used and intended targets. Amnesty International also calls on the Coalition to disclose the measures it took to verify targets were in fact military objectives, whether civilians were present in the vicinity, and the precautions taken to minimise harm. The Coalition should also conduct an urgent review of the procedures via which it assesses allegations of civilian casualties, particularly the reasons so many cases are deemed "non-credible" and therefore do not warrant further investigation.

Furthermore, the Coalition should urgently establish an independent, impartial mechanism to effectively and promptly investigate credible reports of violations of international humanitarian law, make the findings public and put in place the necessary mechanisms to provide prompt and full reparation to victims and families of victims of violations and to allocate adequate budgetary resources. Amnesty International also calls on the Coalition to establish a mechanism ensuring that lessons are learned and that strikes in ongoing Coalition military operations in Syria are carried out in full compliance with the rules of international humanitarian law, as well as provide resources for clearing mines and unexploded ordnance, and ensure displaced civilians have access to humanitarian assistance. Where there is admissible evidence that individual members of Coalition forces are responsible for war crimes, ensure they are prosecuted in a fair trial without recourse to the death penalty.

2. BACKGROUND

Raqqa was the first large Syrian city and provincial capital to fall to armed opposition groups during the crisis and subsequent conflict which engulfed the country since 2011. In early March 2013 armed groups, including the Islamist groups Ahrar al-Sham and Jabhat al-Nusra, expelled government forces from the city. By July 2013 the IS had established a powerful presence in the city and by that year's end it had taken full control, following a power struggle with other armed groups.[1] Raqqa became a magnet for aspiring jihadists and served as IS's de facto capital for its so-called "caliphate", as the group went on to gain control of great swathes of Syria and Iraq in 2014. The city remained under IS control until the joint Coalition-SDF military campaign to oust IS.

The international Coalition to defeat IS in Iraq and Syria was formed in 2014. Named "Operation Inherent Resolve", it described its mission as: *"In conjunction with partner forces Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) defeats ISIS in designated areas of Iraq and Syria and sets conditions for follow-on operations to increase regional stability."*[2] The joint CJTF-SDF military operation to oust IS from Raqqa began on 6 June 2017 and was declared completed on 17 October 2017.

The SDF is a local militia established in October 2015 and includes Arab and other elements but is dominated by Kurdish Yekîneyên Parastina Gel forces (YPG, People's Protection Units). The SDF announced Operation Euphrates Wrath to oust IS from Raqqa and its surrounding areas on 6 November 2016. During the following six months, the SDF and Coalition forces captured several towns and villages around Raqqa, and on 6 June 2017 launched the offensive on Raqqa city.

Amnesty International visited north-eastern Syria in July/August 2017 to investigate conduct of hostilities during the battle and the measures taken by the parties to the conflict – the US-led Coalition, its local partner the SDF and their adversary, IS – to protect civilians in compliance with their legal obligations. On 24 August 2017 Amnesty published a report which raised serious concerns about the US-led Coalition's extensive use of artillery and air strikes in Raqqa and the lawfulness of some of these strikes.[3] In particular, it raised questions about the process by which SDF forces provided target co-ordinates for air and artillery strikes subsequently carried out by the US-led Coalition, as well as SDF and Coalition forces' choice of weapons for fighting in the city. The SDF used US-made, unguided mortars, which are unable to discriminate between civilians and combatants in a populated urban environment, in much the same way as the unguided artillery used by US forces. Another key concern was the large net explosive weight of munitions used in air strikes, which ensured that civilians in the vicinity of intended targets would be killed and maimed.

Immediately following the report's publication, the UN Special Advisor on Syria called for a pause in hostilities to allow civilians out of the city.[4] The Coalition initially dismissed Amnesty International's findings.[5]

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[1] Islamic State (IS) is also known as Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and sometimes Islamic State in the Levant (ISIL). It is also referred to by its Arabic acronym, Daesh.

[2] "Mission Statement", Operation Inherent Resolve, available at http://www.inherentresolve.mil/Portals/14/Documents/Mission/20170717-%20Updated%20Mission%20Statement%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf?ver=2017-07-17-093803-770

[3] Amnesty International, *"I won't forget this carnage": Civilians trapped in the fight for Raqqa – Syria* (Index: MDE 24/6945/2017), 24 August 2017, and available at https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE2469452017ENGLISH.PDF

[4] "No 'worse place on earth' than Syria's Raqqa, says senior UN advisor urging for pause in fighting", UN News, 24 August 2017, available at https://news.un.org/en/story/2017/08/563802-no-worse-place-earth-syrias-raqqa-says-senior-un-adviser-urging-pause-fighting.

[5] *Ibid.* It was not the first time that Coalition military leadership refused to take seriously Amnesty International's concerns about its conduct of hostilities during the war with IS. In response to Amnesty's research detailing failure to protect civilians during the battle for west Mosul (*At any cost: The civilian catastrophe in West Mosul – Iraq* (Index: MDE 14/6610/2017), 11 July 2017, and available at https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2017/07/at-any-cost-civilian-catastrophe-in-west-mosul-iraq/), both Lieutenant General Stephen Townsend and his British Deputy, Major General Rupert Jones, accused Amnesty of *"not understanding the realities of war"*. The British General went as far as calling Amnesty International *"naïve and deeply irresponsible"* for raising concerns about protection of

In the weeks after the publication of the report, however, the Coalition did appear to accept one of its key findings. Among the recommendations that Amnesty International made in the report was that the Coalition widen its investigation of alleged civilian casualty incidents to include site visits and interviews with witnesses. In its September 2017 civilian casualty report, for the first time, CJTF-OIR stated that *"Investigations include interviewing witnesses and examining the site where possible…"*[6] However, Amnesty International is not aware of any cases where Coalition investigators have visited the sites of strike location and/or interviewed witnesses.

Amnesty International's August 2017 report also detailed IS abuses against civilians during the battle for Raqqa, particularly IS's use of civilians as human shields as the conflict got underway and the group redoubled efforts to prevent residents from leaving the city. IS laid mines/IEDs to slow advancing SDF forces and to render exit routes impassable,[7] set up checkpoints around the city to prevent residents from leaving, and its snipers shot and deliberately killed civilians who tried to escape.[8] As the SDF captured neighbourhoods and front lines shifted within the city, IS forced residents to move deeper into areas which remained under its control.

Women walking in rubble-strewn street past destroyed buildings in Raqqa. © Amnesty International

IS's disregard for the most basic rules of international humanitarian law was flagrant. It trapped civilians in their neighbourhoods and used them as cover for military operations. IS entered residents' homes by force and used them to conceal their movements and as firing positions against SDF lines. IS dress code, imposed on civilians and IS fighters alike, made it even more difficult for SDF and Coalition forces to distinguish between them.

civilians in Mosul: "Remarks by General Townsend in a media availability in Baghdad, Iraq", US Department of Defense, 11 July 2017 and available at https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/1244058/remarks-by-general-townsend-in-a-media-availability-in-baghdad-iraq/

[6] "CJTF-OIR Monthly civilian casualty report", Operation Inherent Resolve, 29 September 2017, available at http://www.inherentresolve.mil/News/News-Releases/News-Article-View/Article/1329201/cjtf-oir-monthly-civilian-casualty-report/-

[7] IEDs locally produced by IS are mostly victim-activated and broadly fulfil the function of anti-personnel mines – and are thus banned under international law. In this report, they are referred to as mines and/or IEDs.

[8] The term "sniper" in this report refers to IS fighters who targeted people from concealed positions, even though the exact type of rifle used is unknown.

Civilian residents of Raqqa desperate to get their families to safety resorted to paying smugglers, who knew which streets were mined and where snipers were located, to guide them out the city or, as the battle progressed, out of neighbourhoods still under IS control. These smugglers, mostly IS members, charged up to several hundreds of US dollars per person, which many families simply could not afford. Many of those who were unable to pay smugglers and who tried to flee by themselves were killed and injured by mines/IEDs.

Amnesty International's field investigation carried out in Raqqa after the end of the military operation confirmed the concerns raised in its previous report. The four emblematic cases detailed in this report illustrate a wider pattern, which manifested itself throughout the military operation, as the Coalition neglected to address concerns about civilian casualties raised at the outset. That neglect has continued, with the Coalition failing to adequately investigate and provide reparation, and to provide humanitarian assistance commensurate with the scale of destruction caused.

3. METHODOLOGY

This report is based on field research carried out between 5 and 16 February 2018 in Raqqa, where Amnesty International visited 42 sites of air strikes, artillery and mortar strikes, as well as the places where IS-laid mines/IEDs killed and injured civilians. By the time Amnesty International visited, all neighbourhoods of Raqqa were accessible, though certain roads and buildings could not be accessed due to the possible presence of mines/IEDs. Amnesty researchers visited every neighbourhood in Raqqa and spent considerable time in the neighbourhoods featured in this report, namely the Jezra intersection, Dara'iya, Nazlet al-Shehade, Harat al-Sakhani, al-Fardous and Harat al-Badu.

Two Amnesty International researchers interviewed 112 civilian residents of Raqqa. Several survivors, witnesses and relatives of victims were interviewed separately for each case. Most of the interviews were conducted in Raqqa and some in other locations in northern Syria, including Tabqa. All the interviews were carried out in Arabic by Amnesty International staff, in private, without the presence of any authorities or other parties. When participants were willing, Amnesty International made audio-visual recordings of parts of the interviews. Most did not agree to be filmed for fear of future repercussions. The names of some of the witnesses cited in this report have been changed for their safety.

Amnesty International also interviewed medical and humanitarian personnel operating in Raqqa and elsewhere in north-eastern Syria, members of the military and security forces and the Raqqa Civil Council, international military and security experts and journalists operating in and around Raqqa. The organisation reviewed and verified open-source written and audio-visual material from a variety of sources, including Coalition member states, and obtained and conducted expert analysis of satellite images of several locations in and around Raqqa city taken on different dates before and since the beginning of the Raqqa military operation.

Amnesty International recorded the co-ordinates of each strike covered in this report. Visiting and analysing the scenes of events, coupled with survivors' and witnesses' accounts, enabled Amnesty International to attribute incidents to air strikes, artillery or mortar strikes or IS-laid mines/IEDs. In some instances, remnants of munitions found at the scene of a strike and analysed by military experts provided additional information as to which party would have carried it out.[9]

[9] The presence of widespread unexploded ordnance and mines/IEDs in Raqqa made it too dangerous in most case to search for munitions' fragments in the rubble of bombed buildings.

4. CIVILIANS UNDER FIRE

> **"If you stayed you died and if you tried to escape you died."**
>
> Munira Hashish, air strike and mines survivor

Coalition forces officials repeatedly stated their intention to minimise harm to civilians when carrying out attacks on IS, in compliance with their obligations under international humanitarian law (IHL).[10] That appears to have been the case for many of the strikes, including some investigated by Amnesty International, in Raqqa. However, for other Coalition attacks, including those detailed in this report, there is a strong prima facie evidence that they violated international humanitarian law and therefore were unlawful.[11] It is impossible to determine conclusively how many strikes were unlawful without further information which only the Coalition can provide. To date, the Coalition has not made public the information necessary to make that determination.[12] Amnesty International has requested the information from the Coalition and was awaiting a response at the time of writing.

Field research, including site investigations and interviews with survivors and witnesses, carried out by Amnesty International in Raqqa in a number of cases indicates that Coalition forces failed to take all feasible precautions to minimise harm to civilians, and, in some instances, appear to have launched strikes which were likely to cause excessive civilian harm or which failed to distinguish between military targets and civilians, in violation of the principles of distinction and proportionality. Disproportionate attacks and indiscriminate attacks that kill or injure civilians constitute war crimes.

Urban combat in residential areas presents inherent challenges. These challenges were exacerbated in Raqqa by IS's determination to operate amongst the civilian population and to use civilians as human shields. By the time the Raqqa military campaign got underway, IS's operational tactics had been documented extensively, including during the military campaign in Mosul (Iraq) which presented similar challenges and was reaching its closing stages as the military operation in Raqqa began. Coalition forces failed to take into account sufficiently the fact that large numbers of civilians were present in every neighbourhood of the city as fighting got under way in those areas.

Furthermore, the "patterns of life" – or daily routines – adopted by civilians struggling to survive while a high-intensity urban conflict raged around them, were not particular to Raqqa. These patterns of life had long been observed in other conflicts. They included crowding into homes and shelters, seeking safety in numbers, moving from place to place in search of safety, emerging suddenly from buildings after prolonged

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[10] *"In accordance with the law of armed conflict, the Coalition strikes only valid military targets after considering the principles of military necessity, humanity, proportionality, and distinction"*, Lieutenant General Stephen J. Townsend, CJTF-OIR Commanding General, writing in Foreign Policy, 15 September 2017, available at http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/09/15/reports-of-civilian-casualties-from-coalition-strikes-on-isis-are-vastly-inflated-lt-gen-townsend-cjtf-oir/

[11] For more detailed information on the provisions of international humanitarian law (IHL) relevant to this report, see the Legal Framework section, below.

[12] Necessary information would include, notably, exact strike locations, weapons used and targeting considerations. In its Strike Releases, the Coalition states that: *"CJTF-OIR does not report the number or type of aircraft employed in a strike, the number of munitions dropped in each strike, or the number of individual munition impact points against a target."* Moreover, its definition of what constitutes a strike makes it impossible to know the number of strikes carried out: *"… a single aircraft delivering a single weapon against a lone ISIS vehicle is one strike, but so is multiple aircraft delivering dozens of weapons against a group of ISIS-held buildings and weapon systems in a compound…"*. See CTJF-OIR Strike Releases, available at http://www.inherentresolve.mil/News/Strike-Releases/
SDF forces for their part have not reported at all on the strikes they carried out.

hibernation, moving around front line areas to look for food/water, and sometimes refusing to leave for fear of losing property and/or for fear of danger in flight.

In each of the four cases detailed in this report, Coalition forces launched air strikes on buildings full of civilians using precision munitions with a wide-area effect, which could be expected to destroy them entirely. In each of the cases, the civilians killed and injured in the attacks, many of whom were women and children, had been staying in the buildings for long periods prior to the strikes. Coalition forces would have been aware of their presence had they conducted rigorous surveillance prior to the strikes.

Amnesty International did not discover information indicating that IS fighters were present in the buildings at the time they were hit. All but one of the targeted buildings were single-storey houses surrounded by taller buildings, offering neither strategic vantage points for IS snipers, nor particular protection for IS fighters, compared to taller, sturdier buildings in the areas. Although they could not definitively rule it out, survivors of these strikes were not aware of IS fighters in the vicinity of the houses before they were struck. Even had IS fighters been present, this would neither explain nor justify the targeting of these civilian building with munitions expected to destroy them entirely.

The Coalition's failure to consider adequately the presence of civilians in the city when selecting targets became evident at an early stage of the operation. On 2 July 2017, Lieutenant General Stephen J. Townsend, the US commander of the Coalition force leading the operation, stated: *"… we shoot every boat we find. If you want to get out of Raqqa right now, you've got to build a poncho raft,"*[13] an erroneous assumption that every boat carried IS fighters and weapons, whereas at that time civilians trying to escape the city had few options but to cross the river by boat (the bridges having by then been destroyed by Coalition strikes).[14]

Coalition forces also made extensive use of munitions which have a wide-area effect or which cannot be precisely aimed at specific targets located in populated civilian areas. This is notably the case for artillery rounds, which have a margin of error of up to 50m, even when fitted with precision guidance systems.[15] In fact, most of the artillery shells used by Coalition forces in Raqqa were unguided, with a much wider margin of error of over 100m. In residential areas where buildings are no more than few metres apart, such inaccuracies are virtually certain to cost civilian lives. By their own admission, US forces fired tens of thousands of artillery rounds into the city.[16] Marines brag about burning out their howitzer barrels, having fired so many rounds in such a short period of time.[17] Though this particular report focuses on civilian victims of air strikes, Amnesty International previously documented civilian casualties of Coalition artillery strikes in Raqqa in an earlier report,[18] as well as their use of indiscriminate strikes, notably with white phosphorous in June 2017.[19]

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[13] https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/02/world/middleeast/us-backed-forces-close-to-trapping-isis-holdouts-in-raqqa.html

[14] See: Amnesty International, *"I won't forget this carnage": Civilians trapped in the fight for Raqqa – Syria* (Index: MDE 24/6945/2017) and available at https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE2469452017ENGLISH.PDF

[15] For example, M1156 guiding kits fitted to 155mm artillery rounds, reduce the Circular Error Probable (CEP) to 30-50m, irrespective of the range. However, most of the 155mm artillery rounds used in Raqqa were unguided, with a CEP of as much as 200-300m, when fired from their maximum range. See "How to read the Army's budget request for more precision ordnance", in *The New York Times Magazine*, 1 May 2018, available at https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/01/magazine/army-artillery-budget-howitzer.html
and "XM1156 precision guidance kit heads to Afghanistan" in DefenseMediaNetwork, 26 April 2013, available at https://www.defensemedianetwork.com/stories/xm1156-155mm-precision-guidance-kit-heads-to-afghanistan/
Also see weapons' section on page 51.

[16] "Marine artillery barrage of Raqqa was so intense two howitzers burned out", *Marine Times*, 2 November 2017, available at https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/flashpoints/2017/11/02/marine-artillery-barrage-of-raqqa-was-so-intense-two-howitzers-burned-out/

[17] Ibid

[18] Amnesty International, *"I won't forget this carnage": Civilians trapped in the fight for Raqqa – Syria* (Index: MDE 24/6945/2017) and available at https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE2469452017ENGLISH.PDF

[19] Amnesty International, "Syria: Expert analysis shows US-led coalition use of white phosphorus may amount to war crime", 16 June 2017, available at https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/06/syria-expert-analysis-shows-usled-coalition-use-of-white-phosphorus-may-amount-to-war-crime/

ASWAD FAMILY

NINE CIVILIANS KILLED – EIGHT IN AN AIR STRIKE AND ONE KILLED BY A MINE/IED WHILE TRYING YO REACH SURVIVORS

> **"We kept thinking 'In a couple of days it'll all be over; the SDF will come for us today or tomorrow'."[20]**
>
> Mohammed Othman Aswad who survived the Coalition attack on 8 June 2017

Jamal Othman Aswad was one of four brothers from the low-income district west of the Jezra intersection on the western outskirts of Raqqa city. By the time the Coalition began its campaign to wrest Raqqa from the IS, he was 41 years old and had become a successful trader. In 1990, he and his brothers – Ammar, Mohammed and Khaled (of whom only the latter two survived) – had established a business selling food and household goods. They ran a shop on the busy main road west of the Jezra intersection selling everything from infant milk powder to flat-screen TVs.

The brothers dreamt of constructing their own building and by 2010 – after working together for 20 years – they were able to begin work on a plot opposite the old family home. Construction took a year and cost the brothers' life savings of some USD60,000. Initially they planned to sell some of the 12 apartments and invest profits in the business but when the crisis and subsequent conflict in Syria began, business slowed and they struggled to finish the interior work. They sold only one of the apartments, on the fourth floor, to a family who fitted it out but then moved away from the city.

Unable to complete the internal work on the building, Jamal, Mohammed and Khaled continued to live in rented accommodation elsewhere in the city with their wives and children. The youngest brother, Ammar, lived with their mother in the old family home across the street from the unfinished building. The brothers used the ground floor of the building and the cellar as a warehouse for their goods. With four storeys, the block was one of very few tall buildings in a predominantly one- and two-storey neighbourhood. It also had a cellar; something the older, traditional one-storey houses (usually referred to locally as "Arabic houses") lacked. Shortly after Coalition forces and the local SDF launched the military operation to oust IS from Raqqa on 6 June 2017, the area became a battleground. The Aswad's cellar became a shelter for the family and some of their neighbours.

WHITE PHOSPHOROUS SHELLING

At the beginning of the military operation, before the shelling started, Coalition airplanes dropped leaflets on the Jezra intersection area warning residents to distance themselves from IS fighters and leave the city,[21] a difficult and risky endeavor given IS's proven track record of targeting civilians who attempted to leave cities under its control.[22] On 8 June 2017 Coalition forces fired white phosphorus artillery projectiles above Jezra, seemingly to create a smokescreen through which SDF ground troops could move into the area.[23] Amnesty International verified videos of the event which were published online and showed burning elements coming into contact with civilian houses.[24] White phosphorous-impregnated fragments rained down on the area around the Aswad's building and shop.

Mohammed, one of the Aswad brothers who survived the attack, told Amnesty International:

> *We had been in the basement from 8 June, after the first attack in the area – a white phosphorous bombardment which set my neighbour's food warehouse on fire, as well as another neighbour's*

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[20] Interview with Mohammed Aswad, Raqqa, 8 February 2018.
[21] See, for example, https://www.facebook.com/Raqqa.SI/photos/a.780113668666553.1073741828.780110825333504/1565169326827646/?type=3&theater and https://isis.liveuamap.com/en/2017/8-june-leaflets-dropped-by-international-coalition-onto-raqqa
[22] See, for example, Amnesty International, *At any cost: The civilian catastrophe in West Mosul – Iraq* (Index: MDE 14/6610/2017), available at https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2017/07/at-any-cost-civilian-catastrophe-in-west-mosul-iraq/
[23] The artillery were most likely US-made 155mm M825A1s – Amnesty International Press Release, 16 June 2017, available at https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/06/syria-expert-analysis-shows-usled-coalition-use-of-white-phosphorus-may-amount-to-war-crime/
[24] *Ibid.*

shoe shop on the corner of the main road. During the days, we would spend most of the time in the cellar but we would go in and out between the basement and our old family home across the road, to use the bathroom and kitchen. We had to, as there were no such facilities in the cellar.[25]

As the battle was approaching, the two youngest brothers, Khaled and Ammar, left the area. Both men paid IS-affiliated smugglers in order to leave, as this was the only way out. Jamal and Mohammed also took precautions, sending their mother and their wives and children to safety in Manbij.[26] They decided to stay on to safeguard their business and the building they had worked so hard to construct. They knew that if they left, IS fighters would steal their property and likely make use of the building, putting it at risk of coalition strikes.

Amal Othman, 13, and her brothers Ammar, 8 and Mahmoud, 17; and Jamal Aswad, 41 – four of the eight victims killed in a Coalition air strike on 28 June 2017 in Raqqa. © Private

[25] Interview with Mohammed Aswad, Raqqa, 7 and 8 February 2018.
[26] A city 140km north-west of Raqqa which had been previously recaptured from IS and was under the control of the SDF.

As Jamal and Mohammed took shelter from the shelling in the cellar, they were joined by neighbours, who were unable to leave the city and felt vulnerable in their less sturdy homes.

Umm Ibrahim, a 38-year-old widowed mother of two, who lived a few streets south-west of the Aswad building, told Amnesty International:

> *I spent several nights in the Aswad's cellar with my children. Daesh and the Kurds were fighting each other over our heads and my children were so scared but our home is an Arabic house, which provides no protection from bullets, let alone from mortars and missiles. We felt safer in the cellar and also safer being together with other people. After several days we went back home to change our clothes. Some of my neighbours said that the Kurds had got closer and we could try to run to them. We went with them and managed to reach them safely.*[27]

IS fighters were in the area at the time, though not in the immediate vicinity of the Aswad's building. According to neighbours, IS fighters were mostly staying in and around the Taqua mosque, a few blocks north-east of the Aswads' building. Well aware that IS fighters could enter houses at will and commandeer buildings to use as sniper positions, the Aswad brothers had taken counter-measures. As Mohammed told Amnesty International:

> *Daesh did not come here to our street, but if they had it would have been impossible for them to go up to the roof or to enter the building at all without our knowledge. We had locked all doors and blocked access to the two staircases going up from the ground floor with table tops and pallets. We were going in and out of the cellar all day and after sunset we stayed down in the cellar.*

As the building was new and facilities had not yet been installed, those sheltering in the basement would go across the road to the Aswad's old family house to cook and use the toilet. As Mohammed told Amnesty International:

> *We slept in the basement for around 20 days, from 15 Ramadan [10 June 2017] until the air strike occurred. We slept there every night, even during Eid. Someone brought us bread. We kept thinking 'In a couple of days it'll all be over; the SDF will come for us today or tomorrow.' In all that time the building was never hit.*
>
> *The day before Eid there were five or six other families in the basement with us, then most of them left. Only Abu Mahmoud stayed with his wife and children. I told Abu Mahmoud that he and his family should try to leave as well but he said 'what will be with you will be with me'. I stayed to protect our home and livelihood; our shop was closed and we had stored all the merchandise in the building and in our old family home. Abu Mahmoud thought we would all be safe in the cellar.*
>
> *We spent much of the time in the basement during the day, but going in and out between the basement and our old house across the small road, to use the bathroom and kitchen. We were sure that the warplane would have photographed our street and would know our movements, as we went to and from between the building and the old house across the street, and would have known that we were civilians, families with children. During Eid the shelling had stopped. We thought that that was the end of it.*

THE AIR STRIKE

Mohammed was by the entrance to the cellar when the air strike occurred. It was around 7.30pm on "the fourth day of Eid" (28 June 2017), he told Amnesty International:

> *We were about to have dinner. I know the time because my brother Jamal who was down in the basement had just asked how long before sunset, when he could break his fast. Ramadan was over but Jamal was fasting that day to make up for a day when he had not been able to fast due to shelling in the neighbourhood. I was sitting on an empty oil tin by the basement door chatting to Abu Mahmoud who was crouching next to me. His wife and children were down in the basement with Jamal. When the sun went down we would shut the door and not leave the basement until the morning. The strike came suddenly.*
>
> *I lost consciousness for a while. When I came around it was dark and I discovered I was wounded in my back and my leg. Maybe it was 9pm, I don't know.*

[27] Interview with Umm Ibrahim, Raqqa, 13 February 2018.

The four-storey building was destroyed, the interior structures had given way and the floors were piled on top of one another.

> *I went to shelter in our old family home across the road until daylight. In the early morning I went to the collapsed building. I could see my friend's son, Mahmoud, lying under the debris; he was alive but was trapped from the waist down under a large collapsed column. I could hear my brother Jamal and Abu Mahmoud's daughter, Amal, crying out for help but could not see them. I tried to help Mahmoud but the column was too heavy. I went to look for help; I went to get Abu Mahmoud's brothers from another area and we came back. Mahmoud asked for water and we gave him some. We still could not move the rubble, so I went to ask for help from Daesh near the mosque but they refused and called us 'murtaddin' [apostates]. Finally, I went to the SDF (at their front line position); I went to them with my hands raised but they shouted and shot around (not at) me and told me 'you are Daesh'.*
>
> *Then they held me for two days and in that time I did not know what had happened to my brother Jamal and to Mahmoud and Amal. I knew the others were dead because there was no sound coming from them. The SDF eventually took me to a field hospital in Salhabiyeh where I had the shrapnel taken out of my back and leg, and then they took me to an SDF military intelligence base in Hawi al-Hawa. When they released me [Saturday 1 July 10pm], I went back to the building and found it further collapsed in such a way that it completely obstructed any entry point to the basement. There was no more any sign of life from Mahmoud or from my brother Jamal or anyone else. I left the area and then managed to leave Raqqa.*

The plans of the Aswad building, near the Jezra intersection in western Raqqa, which was bombed by Coalition forces on 28 June 2017, killing eight civilians, five of them children. © Amnesty International

Mohammed Aswad looking down into the basement of his family's building, where his brother and seven other civilians, were killed in a Coalition strike on 28 June 2017. The building was completely destroyed. © Amnesty International

Satellite images showing the Aswad family's building before and after it was destroyed in a Coalition air strike which killed eight civilians, five of them children, on 28 June 2017.

SLOW DEATH UNDER THE RUBBLE

In the meantime, the children's uncles kept going back to the scene of the strike. One of them, Taha Mohammed Othman, told Amnesty International:

> *The first thing that I saw when I went to the collapsed building was my brother – Mohammed Mahmoud Othman [50]. He was dead. Then I saw his son, 17-year-old Mahmoud, trapped under a pillar. We tried but we couldn't drag the pillar off him. Then I saw his 12-year-old brother Anas, who was dead. I couldn't see their sister Amal, 13, but I could hear her. My brother's wife Fatima was in there as well. I didn't see her but later we dug out her body and buried her.*[28]

The uncles remained at the scene until the evening, trying to rescue the survivors trapped under the rubble in the cellar. However hard they tried, without digging equipment it was impossible. They went home and made the perilous return the following day despite shelling and mortar fire, but they still could not get them out. All the while the SDF and IS were shelling each other's positions.

> *On the Thursday [29 June 2017], three of them were alive under the rubble – Jamal, Amal and Mahmoud. We could only see Mahmoud and we could hear the voices of the other two. Mahmoud kept asking, 'Where's my Dad? Where's my sister? Help me, I want water.' Amal was also crying for help, although we couldn't see her. We stayed until the shelling became too close.*
>
> *On the Friday it was difficult to come straight away. There were heavy clashes where we lived. IS kept telling us to move to different places (in the Old City). We asked IS for help to rescue the survivors in the basement but they refused and called us apostates. When we finally made it back to the basement on Friday they were all dead.*

Those killed by the air strike are as follows:

1. Jamal Othman Aswad
2. Mohammed Othman (Abu Mahmoud)
3. Fatima (Mohammed Othman [Abu Mahmoud]'s wife)

Mohammed Othman's children (with his deceased first wife):

4. Mahmoud, 17
5. Amal, 13
6. Ahmed, 14
7. Anas, 12
8. Ammar, eight

Mohammed Aswad told Amnesty International:

> *The children who died were good kids. Their father would often speak of them. He said they were all hard workers. Mahmood was into computers and was good with electronics. He worked in a pharmacy and tried to save money because he wanted to buy a motorcycle. Ahmed was 14 and he loved cars. He worked in a sweet shop. Amal was only 13 but she helped out a lot with the housework after her mother had died two years previously. Anas was 12. He had an old bicycle and he wanted a new one. The youngest to die was eight-year-old Ammar.*

THE MINE/IED

SDF forces prevented residents from returning to Raqqa until some weeks after military operations were finally completed on 17 October. In early November Jamal Othman Aswad's two brothers, Mohammed and Khaled, managed to return to their neighbourhood to recover the bodies of those killed in the air strike which had destroyed their building four months earlier. They hired a bulldozer to remove the rubble of the destroyed building and found Jamal's body. This came as a shock; the brothers had been under the impression that Jamal had been rescued and they had been searching for him, in vain, in hospitals in areas under SDF control.

The brothers had also been searching for their younger brother, Ammar, who had sought refuge in Manbij but had managed to return to Raqqa immediately after the strike. He made the perilous journey with the help of an SDF recruit he knew from Raqqa who told him that their building had been destroyed and that his

[28] Interview with Taha Mohammed Othman, Raqqa, 8 February 2018.

relatives were under the rubble. After embarking on his journey back to Raqqa, Ammar disappeared and his brothers presumed that he had been detained by the SDF. Mohammed told Amnesty International:

> *We had heard rumours that Jamal was in hospital and that Ammar was in prison. Before coming back to Raqqa we had looked for Jamal in all the hospitals – in Tal Abyad, Qamishli, Kobane and Manbij – and we had also asked the SDF about Ammar, but we had received no information about either. We didn't know they were both dead.*
>
> *We didn't know that Ammar was dead until five months after he died, until we found his body on a street near our home, only 50 or 60m away. We identified him by his clothes and by his wedding ring, which was broken on the inside. His body was intact but his head had been smashed. He was wearing the same black jalabiyeh that his wife remembered him wearing when he left Manbij [on his journey back to Raqqa]. His beard was short, as he'd been in Manbij, and not in an area under Daesh control where men were forced to grow long beards. We later learned from the SDF that Ammar had been killed when he had stepped on a mine and that an SDF soldier who was with him lost a leg in the same explosion.*
>
> *We came back to search for Jamal and Ammar. We thought we would find them alive, not dead. All the time, Ammar was lying dead on the next street. We didn't realise that Jamal was dead until we removed all the rubble from the basement. That's when we found his body, along with the bodies of Abu Mahmoud and his family.*

LOOTING

Mohammed and Jamal Aswad had chosen to stay in Raqqa to protect their livelihood. They knew that, were they to leave, their merchandise would likely be stolen by IS fighters. It turned out their fears were well-founded, though the properties were seemingly looted after the SDF forces took control of the area. Mohammed Aswad told Amnesty International:

> *When we came back the Arabic house [the family house across the road from the apartment building] had been looted and all the merchandise that we kept there was gone. We had stored the merchandise in two places – half in the tall building and half in the Arab house – so that if one place was hit we would not lose everything. But everything was gone; tins of cooking oil, barrels of petrol, baby milk powder, plasma TVs, everything.*

Looting of whatever had not been destroyed by the bombardments and the fighting seems to have been routine throughout Raqqa and beyond, in the areas recaptured from IS. Most of the Raqqa residents Amnesty International interviewed reported that their properties – homes as well as businesses – were looted. They blamed SDF members both for looting and allowing others to loot.[29]

MUNITION FRAGMENTS AND COALITION STRIKES REPORTING

Amnesty delegates visited the scene of the strike with Aswad family members who brought fragments of two munitions which they claimed to have recovered from the rubble of the destroyed building. One was part of the motor of an AGM-114 Hellfire missile, manufactured by Alliant Techsystems in Virginia, United States. The other was a fin from a US-designed Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM), a GPS-guided air-delivered bomb.[30]

Coalition reports of the strikes they launched do not contain the necessary details about the exact date, time, and location of the strikes launched. Such lack of transparency makes it impossible to establish whether/which one of the strikes listed in their reports matches the strike on the Aswad building.

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[29] See additional information on page 59.

[30] Amnesty International's researchers photographed the fragments, which were identified by military experts based on serial numbers and other data visible on the fragments. See photographs on page 23.

Fragment of the motor of a US-made AGM-114 Hellfire missile recovered among the ruins of the Aswad family building, destroyed in a Coalition strike which killed eight civilians on 28 June 2017. © Amnesty International

Fragment of a fin from a US-designed Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM), a GPS-guided air-delivered bomb, recovered among the ruins of the Aswad family building, destroyed in a Coalition strike which killed eight civilians on 28 June 2017. © Amnesty International

CJTF-OIR reported carrying out a total of 17 strikes on Raqqa on 28 June 2017. It released the following information about strikes in Raqqa on 28 June 2017:

> *Near Raqqah, 13 strikes engaged nine ISIS tactical units, destroyed 10 fighting positions, two vehicles, a UAS, and suppressed an ISIS tactical unit.*[31]
>
> *On June 28, near Raqqah, Syria, four strikes engaged four ISIS tactical units.*[32]

Two of the strikes were carried out by British aircrafts according to the British Ministry of Defence, which issued the following information about its activities in Raqqa on 28 June 2017:

> *Two Tornado flights operated over Raqqa. At the north-western end of the city, at least 1 suicide bomber was known to be waiting inside a Daesh held building, waiting for an opportunity to attack the SDF as they closed in. The building and the terrorists inside were struck with a Paveway IV. A second such weapon demolished a building in the east, from where heavy fire had been directed at the SDF. This successful strike allowed the SDF to resume their advance.*[33]

The information released by the French Defence Ministry is vaguer in terms of time and fails to provide information above specific days. The French concede, however, that their aircraft also bombed Raqqa during the week in question:

> *This week, Operation Chammal aircraft flew 31 sorties including 29 armed reconnaissance or ground support (close air support), as well as two intelligence gathering sorties. Nineteen strikes were carried out by French planes in Iraq and Syria. Most of them were carried out during the battles of Mosul and Raqqah. These strikes targeted groups of Daesh fighters. The other strikes were carried out in Syria and targeted areas jihadi fighters used for supply and regrouping.*[34]

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[31] Operation Inherent Resolve, "Strikes Releases – June 2017", 20170629 Strike Release – Final.pdf, available at http://www.inherentresolve.mil/News/Strike-Releases/

[32] *Ibid*, 20170701 Strike Release – Final.pdf

[33] British Ministry of Defence "RAF Air strikes in Iraq and Syria: June 2017", available at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/british-forces-air-strikes-in-iraq-monthly-list/june-2017

[34] Armée Française – Operations Militaires – Thursday 29 June 2017, available at (Translated from the following original text: *"Cette semaine, les aéronefs de l'opération Chammal ont réalisé 31 sorties aériennes dont 29 de reconnaissance armée ou d'appui au sol (CAS) et 2 de recueil de renseignements. 19 frappes ont été réalisées par les avions français en Irak et en Syrie. La majeure partie d'entre elles ont été réalisées dans le cadre des batailles de Mossoul et de Raqqah. Ces frappes visaient des groupes de combattants de Daech. Les autres frappes ont été réalisées en Syrie et ont visé des zones de regroupement et de ravitaillements utilisées par les combattants djihadistes."*)

HASHISH FAMILY

NINE KILLED IN AN AIR STRIKE, SEVEN KILLED BY MINES, AND TWO-FAMILY MEMBERS AND A NEIGHBOUR'S CHILD KILLED IN MORTAR STRIKES

> **"It was when they (the Coalition plane) saw us that they struck. The strike occurred straight after we re-entered the house."[35]**
>
> Munira Hashish, air strike and mines survivor

Munira Hashish, a mother of nine in her early 40s, lost 18 members of her family in three separate incidents in July and August 2017. Nine were killed in a Coalition air strike, seven were killed as they tried to flee via a road which IS had mined, and two others were killed by mortars launched by the SDF, which also killed the neighbours' two-year-old child. *"Those who stayed died and those who tried to run away died. We couldn't afford to pay the smugglers; we were trapped,"* she told Amnesty International. She and some of her children survived the air strike and the mines and eventually managed to escape *"by walking over the blood of those who were blown up as they tried to flee ahead of us,"* she said.

Munira and her family lived in Dara'iya, a low-income neighbourhood in western Raqqa. The family was not well off; Munira's husband, Hussein Ibrahim Hashish, supported the family as best he could by selling vegetables out of a cart. Other family members worked in the building trade as casual labourers.

Dara'iya is close to the Jezra intersection (see Aswad case), to the south-east. The shelling started roughly at the same time in both areas, in the days following the start of the military operation (on 6 June 2017). Munira told Amnesty International that those who could, left at that time, but fleeing was difficult, dangerous and expensive. *"Smugglers charged SYP 200,000 per person [around USD390] and we could not afford it. Many of our neighbours were in the same situation. They too were trapped. Some tried to leave without paying the smugglers and they were shot by Daesh or got blown up by the mines that Daesh had laid."*

Despite the dangers, Munira and her family also attempted to leave. She told Amnesty International:

> *We had tried to escape the city but couldn't manage it. About five days after Eid we tried to flee across the river but Daesh caught us.[36] They beat the men very badly and detained me and the other women in a house for a day before they let us go. Thank God they [IS] didn't know my sister's son was with the SDF or they would have killed us all. We would have made more attempts but we were afraid of them and we were afraid of the mines [IEDs].*[37]

MORTARS RAINING DOWN

Munira's family came under attack several times from multiple sides. First a volley of mortars struck the neighbourhood around Munira's brother's house in July 2017,[38] killing her husband, Hussein Ibrahim Hashish, and her brother-in-law, Ibrahim Issa Antar, both in their 40s, as well as their neighbours' two-year-old son, Ali Hassan Nafa. As Munira explained: *"My husband was a humble man who sold vegetables with a pushcart. He and Ibrahim were outside my brother's [Hassan] house; they were leaning against the wall talking when they were killed."* Amnesty International visited the scene on three occasions where several neighbours confirmed the description of the incident. As the two men were killed, another mortar struck a

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[35] Interview with Munira Hashish, Raqqa, 10 February 2017.

[36] Most residents who had fled Raqqa told Amnesty International that they had crossed the Euphrates River in small boats – exposing themselves to the risk of being caught by IS militants and being bombed by Coalition planes which frequently targeted those crossing the river. The rural areas south of the river were still controlled by IS but control was less tight in those rural areas than in the city itself. From there people travelled west through fields and small country lanes and could more easily sneak across the frontlines into areas which had already been recaptured by the SDF.

[37] Interview with Munira Hashish, Raqqa, 10 February 2017

[38] The witnesses and survivors that Amnesty International interviewed in this case were unable to recall the precise dates of the incidents detailed in this report. Their time references were split between events occurring either during or after Ramadan 2017 (Ramadan in Syria in 2017 ran from 27 May to 25 June). Inability to recall precise dates is common to civilians who survived prolonged periods in conflict zones and suffered traumatic events.

home across the narrow street, which killed two-year-old Ali Hassan Nafa and injured his father, Hassan. Ali's mother told Amnesty International:

> *It was early morning, about 7am, and we were sleeping outside in the courtyard because it was hot. Ali was our only child. We had been married for many years but it took us so long to have a baby; we waited so many years and in the end we were blessed to have Ali. He was all we had, he was my life.*[39]

While investigating this case, Amnesty delegates met an SDF member, who told the delegates: *"We rained mortars down without discrimination, to clear the area."* Other SDF members echoed his description.[40]

Those killed by the mortars are as follows:

1. Hussein Ibrahim Hashish, late 40s (Munira's husband)
2. Ibrahim Issa Antar, 40s (Munira's sister's husband)
3. Ali Hassan Nafa, two (neighbours' child)

THE MINE/IED

Mohammed Hashish and his cousin Hussein, both injured by mines laid by IS as they were trying to flee Raqqa in August 2017. Hussein's parents and five relatives were killed in the explosion and Hussein lost his left foot. © Amnesty International, © Private

Several weeks after the mortar strike which killed Munira's husband and brother-in-law, the family made another attempt to escape. Seven family members were killed and several others injured by IS-laid mines/IEDs. The explosions occurred several blocks from the family's home, along a residential road, close to the intersection with the main road. IS usually mined each road with more than one explosive device in order to maximise impact. Mohammed Hashish, 12, one of the children injured in the explosion told Amnesty International:

> *We walked soflty, softly, trying not to make any noise so that if Daesh were lurking around they would not hear us. We walked through several streets and when we got a point very close to the main road the street we were walking on was blocked by a small earth mound; we had to walk on it to pass, and when we did, the explosion happened.*[41]

Mohammed was among the injured. His right heel was shattered and he was still limping eight months after he sustained the injury. Hussein, the three-month-old baby son of Hassan and Azar, lost his left foot in the

[39] Interview with Zahra Nafa, Raqqa, 10 February 2017.
[40] Amnesty International spoke to nine SDF members separately in different neighbourhoods of Raqqa on different dates between 5 and 16 February 2017. Names, exact dates and locations are withheld to protect their identity.
[41] Interview with Mohammed Hashish, Raqqa, 15 February 2017.

explosion that killed both his parents.

Those killed by the mine are as follows:

1. Mahdiya Ibrahim Hashish, 38 (Hussein Ali Hashish's wife)

Mahdiya's five children:

2. Hassan Hussein Hashish, 18-19
3. Ahmed Hussein Hashish, 16
4. Fatima Hussein Hashish, 10
5. Ismael Hussein Hashish, nine
6. Mustafa Hussein Hashish, seven

Mahdiya's daughter-in-law (her eldest son's Hassan's wife)

7. Azar Ahmed Kutshi, 17

THE AIR STRIKE

During the last two weeks of August, after the mine/IED had killed seven family members as they attempted to escape, the house where Munira and her family were staying was hit by an air strike, which left nine dead and several injured.[42] Amnesty International visited the scene of the strike on three separate occasions. Munira told Amnesty International:

> *Daesh were in the area, we didn't see them in our street but we knew that at night they went around on motorcycles and lay mines [IEDs] under cover of darkness. It was impossible to know which house IS would be in from day-to-day as they used to move around. We heard that they had made openings in the walls of people's houses so they could move without being seen on the streets. Any house was their house if they so wished.*[43]

The house was a single-storey house with five rooms arranged around a courtyard. Munira described how at 8am the men had left the house to fetch bread. As the bakeries had ceased to function, they had no choice but to search for bread in abandoned houses. Later that morning Munira and her two brother's wives had filled a wheelbarrow with jerry cans and went to a well to fetch water. As they were returning to the house, a volley of shells landed close-by but the women made it inside unharmed. Munira then explained what happened next:

> *It was when they (the Coalition planes) saw us that they struck. The strike occurred straight after we re-entered the house. It happened just after the call for midday prayer. I remember hearing the call to prayer, then the strike happened. My brothers Hussein and Mohammed and their kids and the neighbours were all killed. Those who were not killed were injured. The only one who survived unharmed is my grandchild, a baby aged four months. I was holding him in my arms and he was not hurt.*[44]
>
> *We pulled the children out between life and death. My four-year-old granddaughter Ahad's knee was destroyed. We tried to get her to hospital for five hours but Daesh kept sending us back – Daesh left her to bleed for five hours and there was fighting around and planes in the sky. Eventually we managed to get her to the National Hospital. Later we made it out of Raqqa and she was treated by MSF in Tel Abyad. She's in Turkey now.*
>
> *I was injured and so were all my children. My seven-year-old son, Ahmad, was the worst; he suffered severe wounds to his abdomen. He never healed properly as he could not get proper medical care; he needs treatment. My nephew Hassan, who was only seven months old, lost his right foot. He lost both his parents and also his foot. He needs a prosthetic foot before he learns to walk, so that he can learn properly.*

Those killed by the air strike are:

1. Hussein Ibn Ali Hashish, 45 (Munira's brother)
2. Mohammed Ibn Ali Hashish, 40 (Munira's brother)
3. Amal, six (Mohammed's daughter)

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[42] See footnote 38.
[43] Interview with Munira Hashish, Raqqa, 10 February 2017.
[44] *Ibid.*

4. Nour Aayoun, four (Mohammed's daughter)

As well as:

5. Nidhal Qacem, 25 (Munira's son-in-law)
6. Manar, three (Nidhal's daughter)

And three distant relatives who had been sheltering with the Hashish family:

7. Umm Najem
8. Najem, 12 (Umm Najem's son)
9. Abdallah, 17

Munira does not know why the house was bombed. She told Amnesty:

> *Daesh was in the area but not specifically in our street. They did not come to our house; it was an Arabic house [one storey], not a tall building, so it wasn't useful for them. We stayed in the house and kept very quiet, did not put on any light at night to avoid Daesh seeing us, because if they did they would have likely sent us to the centre of town [as human shields]. We didn't want to go that way; we wanted to stay in our home because the SDF were getting close and we wanted to be liberated.*
>
> *In the end we managed to escape Dara'iya by walking on the blood of others. We stepped where other people had been blown up, in the hope that there were no more live mines in that spot. It feels terrible but that is what we did. We had no choice.*

Ali Hassan Nafa; Mahdia Hashish and her husband Hussein Ali; Hussein Hashish, Mohammed Hashish and Hussein Ibrahim Hashish, and Mohammed Ali Hashish. © Private

Satellite images showing the house where nine members of the Hashish family were killed in a Coalition strike, before and after the strike.

OTHER ATTACKS IN THE AREA

While investigating this case, Amnesty International delegates visited the scenes of other strikes and collected information on several other cases of civilians killed in and around their homes in the same neighbourhood around the same time. Some were killed in air or artillery strikes carried out by Coalition forces, while others were killed in mortar strikes seemingly launched by SDF forces. Mortar fragments recovered at the sites of these incidents and identified by military experts have been identified by Amnesty International as American 120mm mortars, used by the SDF (IS mostly used their own locally manufactured mortars).[45]

COALITION REPORTING

Given the witnesses' and survivors' uncertainty about precise dates, Amnesty International examined satellite imagery of the location, as it did for each of the attacks detailed in this report. The satellite imagery confirmed that the Hashish house was destroyed between 19 and 30 August 2017. Expert analysis of the satellite imagery confirmed that the pattern of destruction was consistent with an air strike having occurred. According to open source material, the air strike occurred on 19 August 2017.[46] Given that the building was still standing on 18 August, 19 August is considered the most likely date of destruction.

CJTF-OIR released the following information about strikes "Against ISIS Terrorists" in Raqqa on 19 August 2017. It reported carrying out a total of 48 strikes on Raqqa that day:

> *Near Raqqah, five strikes engaged two ISIS tactical units and destroyed three fighting positions.*[47]
>
> *On Aug. 19, near Raqqah, Syria, 36 strikes engaged 22 ISIS tactical units and destroyed 29 fighting positions and seven command and control nodes.*[48]
>
> *On Aug. 19, near Raqqah, Syria, six strikes engaged an ISIS tactical unit and destroyed five fighting positions, an IED, and a command and control node.*[49]
>
> *On Aug. 19, near Raqqah, Syria, one strike suppressed an ISIS tactical unit.*[50]

Some of these strikes were carried out by British aircraft. The British Ministry of Defence released the following information:

> *Saturday 19 August – Tornados continued to provide close air support to the Syrian Democratic Forces in Raqqa, destroying a terrorist strongpoint.*[51]

During the course of the Raqqa operation, the French Defence Ministry occasionally released weekly updates of its activities including the strikes it carried out. It did not release information about the week in question.

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[45] Photographs of the fragments taken by Amnesty International researchers are on file with the organisation.
[46] Facebook page "Raqqa is being slaughter silently" (Arabic only), posted on 1 September 2017 and available at https://www.facebook.com/Raqqa.SI/posts/1666199833391261
[47] Operation Inherent Resolve, "Strikes Releases – August 2017", 20170820 Strike Release.pdf, available at http://www.inherentresolve.mil/News/Strike-Releases/
[48] *Ibid,* 20170821 Strike Release.pdf
[49] *Ibid,* 20170822, Strike Release.pdf
[50] *Ibid,* 20170823 Strike Release.pdf
[51] British Ministry of Defence "RAF air strikes in Iraq and Syria: August 2017", available at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/british-forces-air-strikes-in-iraq-monthly-list/raf-air-strikes-in-iraq-and-syria-august-2017

BADRAN FAMILY

THIRTY-NINE CIVILIANS FROM ONE FAMILY AND 10 NEIGHBOURS KILLED IN SEVERAL AIR STRIKES AS THEY FLED FROM NEIGHBOURHOOD TO NEIGHBOURHOOD

> **"We hid in the rubble until the morning because the planes were circling overhead. In the morning we found Tulip's body; our baby was dead. We buried her near there, by a tree."[52]**
>
> Rasha Badran, air strikes survivor

Baby Tulip Badran, who was killed along with 27 relatives and five neighbours when the house where her family was sheltering was destroyed in a Coalition strike on 20 August 2017 in Raqqa. © Private

The ordeal endured by the Badran family provides a harrowing illustration of what had become a pattern of life for civilians trapped in Raqqa city as the battle raged and front lines shifted around them. Thirty-nine members of the family, from three generations, and 10 neighbours were killed in three separate strikes in the very places where they sought shelter, as they fled from neighbourhood to neighbourhood. They had not followed their relatives who fled early on in the conflict because they did not think the situation would become so bad. As Rasha, one of the survivors explained:

> *We thought the forces who came to evict Daesh would know their business and would target Daesh and leave the civilians alone. We were naïve. By the time we realised how dangerous it had become everywhere, it was too late; we were trapped.*[53]

Rasha and Abdulwahab Badran are in their mid and late 20s and were the proud parents of a one-year-old girl called Tulip. *"We debated names of several flowers and in the end we chose Tulip",* recalled Rasha. Tulip, their only child, was among those killed in the last of the three strikes the young couple had survived. *"She was an amazing baby. We lived on the run and under bombardment for weeks. We couldn't carry her toys as we moved around, only essentials, but Tulip adjusted very quickly and did not make a fuss. She was a joy"*, Rasha told Amnesty International.[54]

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[52] Interview with Rasha Badran, Raqqa, 16 February 2017.
[53] *Ibid.*
[54] *Ibid.*

Rasha and Abdulwahab lived in al-Fardous, a neighbourhood to the north-west of the city centre, not far from the stadium and the National Hospital.

> *We lived in a six-floor building but on the first floor so we thought we would be safe. But then two days before Eid [27th day of Ramadan] at about 9pm or 10pm at least three artillery shells landed in the street outside our building. We ran away and found shelter in a building near the Mara'i bakery. It was a four-storey building and we stayed on the first floor. We spend Eid there but a couple days later the building was hit (unclear if this was artillery or mortar fire) and four of our relatives were injured (two men and two women). So we fled again, but by then we had our injured relatives with us and we needed to find medical care for them and our movement was more restricted – as it was difficult for them to move.*

This time the family went a few streets towards the north-east, into the centre of Raqqa near Mansour Street. They only stayed for four days, however, because IS had begun rounding up civilians from the streets to the south of the main thoroughfare (23 February Street) and forcing them to move further west, back towards al-Fardous, Harat al-Badu and Nazlet al-Shehade. Rasha told Amnesty International:

> *We went to Sharia al-Mansour and we took shelter in a two-storey house but after four days there Daesh forced us to move towards al-Fardous and Harat al-Badu neighbourhoods. So we went to Nazlet al-Shehade. On 18 July we fled from there because the fighting was getting closer. As we were fleeing nine of our relatives were killed in two bombardments – five of them in one of the houses just as they were about to leave and four others in the car. We had just left along with the rest of the women and children while the men were still at the house preparing to leave when the house and the car were bombed.*

The ruins of the destroyed house where 28 members of the Badran family and five neighbours were killed in a Coalition strike on 20 August 2017 in Raqqa. © Amnesty International

Members of the Badran family killed in three separate Coalition air strike on 18 July and 20 August 2017 in Raqqa. © Private

THE AIR STRIKES IN NAZLET AL-SHEHADE

FIVE FAMILY MEMBERS (PLUS TWO OTHERS) KILLED IN AN AIR STRIKE ON A HOUSE; FOUR MORE KILLED IN AN AIR STRIKE ON A CAR

IS had forced the Badran family to move to Nazlet al-Shehade. They got there separately, as they had been staying in different neighbourhoods. In Nazlet al-Shehade they stayed in a small house – the men in one room and the women and children in the next room. The Badrans were afraid of the approaching fighting but they knew that IS would shoot them if they tried to escape from the area. Their only chance to leave was to wait until the fighting reached a level that IS were either too engaged in battle or were fleeing the area themselves. On 18 July 2017, with the fighting intensifying in the area, the family took their chance to flee.

The Badrans had access to two cars in which they made several frantic trips, moving the women and children first. During one of these journeys, one of the cars was struck, reportedly by an air strike, killing four male family members inside. At the same time, another air strike destroyed the house where the men had been staying, just as they were waiting for a car to collect them. That strike killed five family members, along with two other men, relatives' friends whose names the survivors did not know.

Amnesty International visited the destroyed house and spoke to members of the extended family, who had witnessed the strike and later helped to recover the bodies from the rubble. Hussein Ali, who lost his uncle in the strike, told Amnesty International:

> *I had been staying with my wife's family near the house where the Badrans were sheltering, along with my aunt's husband. I went to them that morning [18 July] to ask if they needed anything and they told me that they were just waiting for the car which had taken the women and children to come back to pick them up. The women and children had left a little earlier. They had some bread and food which the women had left for them to take to the place where they were going. By then it was so difficult to find food – they were not going to leave the food behind. At around 10.30am I wished them a safe journey and left. Shortly afterwards the house was bombed. It was an air strike. We were there to see it and the entire house was destroyed. We could not go to the house immediately because artillery shells were landing in the area. How did I know it was artillery? From the sound; it was louder and made a bigger thump than the mortars.*
>
> *Shortly afterwards, a few streets away we saw the car which had taken the women and children slightly earlier on. It had been struck by an air strike I think, and it was burning. The men inside the car were killed. Initially I only saw two bodies, at the front, and then the other two, at the back.*[55]

Hussein and some of his relatives returned the following day to look for the bodies and bury them. Another female relative told Amnesty International: *"We buried them. There wasn't one body left intact. We took them out in pieces. We put the piece into plastic bags and we buried them."*[56]

Those killed by the air strike on the house at Nazlet al-Shehade:

1. Mohamed Ahmed Badran Ibn Mohammed, 40 (Shamsa's husband)
2. Daham Badran Ibn Ahmed, 50 (Shamsa's husband's brother)
3. Ismael Said, 55 (Sadeeqa's husband)
4. Ibrahim Said Ibn Ismael, 15 (Sadeeqa's son)
5. Khaled Badran Ibn Ibrahim, 52
6. An unidentified man
7. An unidenitfied man

Those killed in the strike on the car while escaping from Nazlet Shehade:

1. Mustafa Mohammed Badran (aka Steif), 14 (Shamsa's son)
2. Khaled Ismail Said, 17
3. Mohamed Hussein Shamari (Khood's son), 24
4. Hassan Dandoush Ibn Hsein (son of Zarifa Sahu)

[55] Interview with Hussein Ali, Raqqa, 11 February 2017.
[56] Interview with Hussein Ali's relative, Raqqa, 11 February 2017.

Satellite images showing the house where seven members of the Badran family were killed in a Coalition strike on 18 July 2017, before and after the strike.

THE AIR STRIKES IN HARAT AL-SAKHANI

THIRTY-THREE MEMBERS OF THE BADRAN FAMILY AND OTHER CIVILIANS WERE KILLED IN HARAT AL-SAKHANI

Rasha, Abdulwahab and other surviving relatives went back to al-Fardous, to be near the hospital so that their injured relatives could get some medical care. Their home in al-Fardous had been destroyed so they stayed in a neighbour's house next door. They were there for a month but then the hospital ceased to function and they could no longer get bread or water. They went to Harat al-Sakhani neighbourhood in the Old City because they had been told there was a doctor working there.

As Rasha explained, they found the doctor – Dr Sofian Delli – and he did his best to treat their relatives. The family also found two houses to stay in but the area was not safe. On or around 18 August, shortly after arriving, Rasha, Abdulwahab and Tulip and other surviving Badran family members joined other local residents and decided to flee as a group.[57] The group of around 65 got as far as Tal Abyad Street, by the Andalus Bakery, when they encountered three IS fighters who opened fire at them. Dr Delli was killed and his father was injured. The family went back to the houses in Harat al-Sakhani. In Rasha's own words:

> *So we went back to al-Sakhani. We had no other options. Two days later [on 20 August] we were bombed, both houses where we were staying got bombed. Almost everybody was killed. Only I, my husband and his brother and cousin survived. The strike happened at about 7pm. I fainted and when I regained consciousness I heard my husband's cousin, Mohammed, calling out. I could neither move nor speak. Then my husband and his brother found me. My husband was the most seriously injured – he had a head wound and blood was pouring from his ears. It was dark and we could not see anything. We called out but nobody else answered; nobody moved. It was completely silent except for the planes circling above.*
>
> *We hid in the rubble until the morning because the planes were circling overhead. In the morning we found Tulip's body; our baby was dead. We buried her near there, by a tree.*
>
> *Both houses were pulverised; nothing was left standing, there was only rubble. These were simple Arab houses, they were not sturdy. I don't understand why they bombed us. Didn't the surveillance planes see that we were civilian families?*[58]

Those killed in the main house at Harat al-Sakhani:

Six siblings – six sisters and one brother (Ali):

1. Thuraya Daham bint Mustafa, in her 60s
2. Summaia Daham bint Mustafa, 55 (widowed, without children)
3. Abta bint Mustafa Dahab, in her 50s
4. Ali Badran Ibn Mustafa, 50
5. Khood Daham bint Mustafa, 48
6. Shamsa Daham bint Mustafa, 40 (Shamsa's husband was killed at Nazlet al-Shehada)
7. Sadeeqa Daham bint Mustafa, 38 (Sadeeqa's husband was killed at Nazlet al-Shehada)

Thuraya's son and his family:

8. Ibrahim Daham Ibn Khaleel, late 20s/early 30s
9. Madonna Daham, mid 20s (Ibrahim's wife – originally from Damascus)
10. Madonna's son, five
11. Madonna's other son, three
12. Madonna's daughter, nine months

Abta's children:

13. Qaisal Sahoo Ibn Mohammed, 20 (Abta's son)
14. Mais Sahoo bint Mohammed, 19 (Abta's daughter)

Khood's daughter:

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[57] Survivors and witnesses often find it difficult to be precise about dates, amidst the trauma and the break-down in daily routines.
[58] Interview with Rasha Badran, Raqqa, 16 February 2017.

15. Rana Shamari bint Hussein, 18 (Khood's daughter)

Shamsa's children:

16. Sahar Badran bint Mohammed, 18
17. Saja Badran bint Mohammed, 16
18. Ahmed Badran Ibn Mohammed, 10
19. Hamsa Badran Ibn Mohammed, nine
20. Daham Badran Ibn Mohammed, four

(As well as her husband, Shamsa's sixth child, Mustafa, was killed previously at Nazlet al-Shehade)

Sadeeqa'a children:

21. Sidra Said bint Ismael, 12
22. Munthir Said Ibn Ismael, 11
23. Aseel Said Ibn Ismael, six
24. Khatooneh Wahab, 75

Four others who were not from the Badran family also were killed:

25. Abu Riad, 60s
26. Souad, 50s (Abu Riad's wife – originally from Iraq)
27. Maha, mid 20s (daughter of Abu Riad and Souad)
28. Ammina Raqim, 60s (Abu Riad's sister)

Those killed in the other house across the street at Harat al-Sakhani:

1. Ibrahim Wahab Fahad, in his 70s (a tribal sheikh)
2. Khadeeja Sahoo bint Tayeb, 60 (Ibrahim's wife)
3. Tulip Fahad, one-year-old (Rasha and Abdulwahab's daughter)
4. Mohamed Khaleel Badran, 32-33
5. Senad Dhaba, 19 (originally from Aleppo)

Another family member is also missing. When the family were staying in the al-Fardous neighhourhood (see below), Mohamed Fahad, 72, went out on foot to look for water some 20 days before the strikes on Harat al-Sakhani (in late July 2017) and never returned. The family does not know what happened to him.

THE AIR STRIKE AT AL-FARDOUS

The young couple and their two relatives soon realised that they were the only survivors. After they buried baby Tulip, they left, once again trying to find a safe place to shelter.

> *[After the air strike on 20 August], we went back to al-Fardous, to the same house as before. Then we tried to escape. Ousama and Mohammed, my husband's brother and cousin, went to a neighbour to ask if they wanted to join us, so we would go as a group. As they came out from the neighbour's and were trying to cross the street, a drone struck the road, so they ran back into the neighbour's house. And immediately then a plane bombed the house (three floors) and destroyed it. Mohamed and Ousama and the owner of the house and two guests were all killed.*[59]

> *We hid in the basement for three days, then Daesh discovered us and told us to leave. We walked towards the stadium and Harat al-Badu – me, my husband and five neighbours. We stayed in Harat al-Badu for two nights. Then we went to a nearby mosque (al-Nawawi mosque) for one night. There were about 60 or 65 people sheltering in the mosque. Finally, on 17 September at about 4am – we used the time of the morning prayer call to cover the noise of our steps – about 25 of us managed to cross the front line to where the SDF where. The rest could not make it because Daesh snipers started to shoot and they were forced to go back. I don't know how many of them made it out alive, if any were killed by Daesh or by the Coalition bombardments.*[60]

After weeks of hiding and fleeing the young couple finally managed to reach safety. They had lost their baby and 38 other family members in the ordeal.

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[59] Unlike the sites of the strikes in Nazlet al-Shehade and Harat al-Sakhani, Amnesty International was unable to visit the site of the al-Fardous strikes, where according to the testimonies of the witnesses interviewed by Amnesty International, five civilians were killed in an air strike.

[60] Interview with Rasha Badran, Raqqa, 16 February 2017.

Satellite images showing the house where 28 members of the Badran family and five neighbours were killed in a Coalition strike on 20 August 2017, before and after the strike.

COALITION REPORTING

CJTF-OIR released the following information about strikes "Against ISIS Terrorists" in Raqqa on 18 July and 20 August 2017. It reported carrying out a total of 30 strikes in Raqqa that day:

> *On July 18 – Near Raqqah, 12 strikes engaged 11 ISIS tactical units and destroyed nine fighting positions, two vehicles and a tactical vehicle.*[61]
>
> *On July 18, near Raqqah, Syria, 18 strikes engaged 12 ISIS tactical units; destroyed 18 fighting positions, an anti-aircraft artillery system, a weapons cache, and a sniper position; and damaged a fighting position and a supply route.*[62]

CJTF-OIR released the following information about strikes "Against ISIS Terrorists" in Raqqa on 20 August 2017. It reported carrying out a total of 54 strikes in Raqqa that day:

> *On Aug. 20 – Near Raqqah, 21 strikes engaged 14 ISIS tactical units and destroyed 22 fighting positions, two UAS staging areas, two heavy machine guns, a vehicle and an explosives cache.*[63]
>
> *On Aug. 20, near Raqqah, Syria, 33 strikes engaged 21 ISIS tactical units and destroyed 41 fighting positions, five command and control nodes, an IED, an ISIS headquarters, two supply caches, ISIS engineering equipment and an ISIS UAS.*[64]

The British Ministry of Defence also reported carrying out air strikes on at least two targets in Raqqa on 20 August, with the following update:

> *Sunday 20 August, Typhoons bombed a further Daesh position in Raqqa.*[65]

The French Defence Ministry did not release information about its activities during the weeks of 18 July 2017 or 20 August 2017.

Incident reporting for the late August and early September (the survivors could not recall the exact date of the strike in al-Fardous which killed Ousama and Mohammed Badran and three others) is similarly vague, providing no indication of whether the reported strikes could be the same as those which killed the members of the Badran family.

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[61] Operation Inherent Resolve, "Strikes Releases – July 2017", 20170719 Strike Release.pdf, available at http://www.inherentresolve.mil/News/Strike-Releases/
[62] *Ibid,* 20171720 Strike Relases.pdf
[63] Operation Inherent Resolve, "Strikes Releases – August 2017", 20170821 Strike Release.pdf, available at http://www.inherentresolve.mil/News/Strike-Releases/
[64] Ibid, 20170822 Strike Release.pdf
[65] British Ministry of Defence, "RAF air strikes in Iraq and Syria: August 2017", available at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/british-forces-air-strikes-in-iraq-monthly-list/raf-air-strikes-in-iraq-and-syria-august-2017#sunday-20-august

FAYAD FAMILY

SIXTEEN FAMILY MEMBERS AND NEIGHBOURS KILLED IN TWO SIMULTANEOUS AIR STRIKES

> **"He insisted that he had lived here for 50 years and would not be evicted by these people who had taken control of the city and who he considered illiterate, ignorant and extremists."[66]**
>
> "Fares" Fayad, air strikes survivor

No one knows his exact age, but Fayad Mohammed Saif was in his 80s when he was killed on 12 October 2017 together with his three daughters and 11 other relatives and acquaintances. His house and that of his brother-in-law, Hussein Hamad Fares, across the small street, where other relatives and neighbours were sheltering, were struck by Coalition planes just as a truce was being implemented which three days later would see the remaining hundreds of IS fighters being allowed to leave Raqqa in safety and with complete impunity.

Fayad was known as Abu Saif, ("Saif's Father", after his eldest son). He had married late for a man of his generation, in his late 30s or early 40s, upon his return from working in Kuwait. Abu Saif had lived in his house for at least four decades, since before there were any tall buildings in the area. He had been in Harat al-Badu so long that local people refer to the street he lived on as "Abu Saif Street".

Initially Abu Saif had worked as a supplier of materials to the building trade. Later he supplied produce to supermarkets. After working all his life, he was a man of considerable financial means. A religious man who loved to pray, he used to complain that IS militants talked in the name of a religion they knew nothing about. Every Monday and Thursday throughout the entire three-and-a-half years of IS rule in Raqqa, Abu Saif made a point of shaving, as he always had – defying IS's rules which demanded that men grow long beards. *"It was his way of resisting and showing defiance,"* his relatives told Amnesty International. IS seemed to tolerate him, but only because of his age and the respect he commanded in the neighbourhood. He even had a secret internet connection in his home – an "offence" warranting a severe punishment under IS if discovered.[67]

He loved to be with children. A neighbour's child told Amnesty International: *"He made us laugh by joking and singing silly songs"*.[68]

Abu Saif used to tell his children that they were the only things that mattered to him, as well as his house, and that the rest was up to God. He refused to leave his house when the military operation to recapture Raqqa began (in early June 2017). *"He insisted that he had lived here for 50 years and would not be evicted by these people who had taken control of the city and who he considered illiterate, ignorant and extremists,"* his relative told Amnesty International.[69] Most of his children stayed with him during the siege, and some left with their own families. They stayed mostly indoors, in the large, one-storey house, surviving mainly on dates and bread and using a secret internet connection to communicate with family members outside the city. They had money but there was not much food to buy.

[66] Interview with "Fares" Fayad (real name withheld for security reasons), Raqqa, 11 February 2017.
[67] Anyone caught with phone or internet connection would be suspected of spying against IS and risked being killed.
[68] Interview with Mohammed, 13, Abu Saif's neighbour, Raqqa, 11 February 2018.
[69] Interview with "Fares" Fayad (real name withheld for security reasons), Raqqa, 11 February 2017.

Fayad Mohammed and his daughters Wafa', Fadda and Tamam; Ammar al-Faris; Reem al-Maddad, Yusra Abd-al-Aziz, and baby Razqiya Habib; Jasim Hamal and Salem Hamad. They were among the 16 civilians killed in Coalition air strikes on 12 October 2017 in Raqqa. © Private

THE FINAL STAGES OF BATTLE

Harat al-Badu, a built-up area in central Raqqa, next to the stadium, was the scene of the final battle in the city between SDF-Coalition forces and IS. As in other parts of Raqqa, IS restricted people's movements out of Harat al-Badu from the beginning of the conflict. As the SDF took control of more and more of the city, IS fighters retreated to the area around the stadium, including the Harat al-Badu neighbourhood. IS fighters also redoubled efforts to force civilians from other areas into Harat al-Badu in order to use them as human shields. As a result, the number of civilians in Harat al-Badu during the closing stages of the battle was high and fleeing had become even more difficult. Ammar Amero, a taxi driver who remained in his home throughout the siege, told Amnesty International, *"every house was full of people – in many houses both IS and civilians."*[70]

THE INITIAL TRUCE

In early October IS militants informed civilians in Harat al-Badu that there would be a truce between them and the SDF surrounding the neighbourhood, under which both IS fighters and civilians would be allowed to leave the area. Local IS fighters also informed people, however, that, although the SDF were prepared to allow Syrian IS fighters to leave, they did not want to extend the privilege to foreign fighters. According to those in the area at the time, there were many Tunisian and Saudi fighters within IS ranks in Harat al-Badu, along with Syrian IS members from Homs and Aleppo.

The truce came into effect on 9 or 10 October 2017. It was supposed to hold for three days before both IS and the trapped civilians would be allowed to leave, but it did not last. Residents told Amnesty International that at around 4pm on 11 October some IS fighters fired mortars and rifles in the direction of the SDF forces in what locals believe was a deliberate attempt by foreign die-hard fighters to break the truce. Taxi driver Ammar, for example, put this down to disunity between local IS members and foreign fighters, who were suspicious about the terms of the truce. After the truce was broken, other IS members went looking for those responsible. The SDF and the Coalition responded almost immediately with artillery and air strikes. Residents told Amnesty International that it was a ferocious assault, which lasted throughout the evening and night.

THE AIR STRIKES

> **"I felt the roof of the house collapse on me... I called my wife, my mother, my daughter, but nobody answered… I realised that everybody was dead."**
>
> Ali Habib, a taxi driver and father of six

Abu Saif's house and that of Hussein Hamad Fares, across the small street, were among the last houses struck in the early hours of 12 October 2018. Among those sheltering in Hussein Hamad Fares' house were Ali Habib and his family. His wife, his baby daughter and his mother were killed, along with Hussein Hamad Fares, his son Ammar and five other neighbours who were sheltering there. Ali Habib and his five-year-old son survived, both seriously injured.

In addition to his own family, Ali Habib, a taxi driver and father of six, was also looking after his half-brother and four half-sisters and his bedridden step-mother. He could not afford to pay smugglers to take his family out of Raqqa. As many other residents, the family left their home and tried to find safety where they could. He told Amnesty International:

> *When the war started in Raqqa we first went to stay near the river, on the north side of the river, by the old bridge. We stayed there for 21 days in a tent. But just after Eid, Daesh forced us to move from there back into the city.*[71]

The family then moved to Harat al-Kuwait but had to move again after two days because the area came

[70] Interview with Ammar Amero, Raqqa, 11 February 2018.
[71] Interview with Ali Habib, near Raqqa, 14 February 2018.

under mortars and artillery fire and air strikes. The two-storey house they were sheltering in took a direct hit and the family fled to Intifada Street, but there too they soon came under fire. After five days they fled to Harat al-Badu, first sheltering in an empty apartment they found in a four-storey building. After the ceasefire was first announced, around 10 October, the family tried once again to flee but only Ali Habib's brother managed, with Ali Habib's three oldest daughters and his oldest son. Ali Habib and the rest of the family were forced back by IS sniper fire, and they returned to the same apartment they had just left. As the ceasefire collapsed on the evening of 11 October, the shelling and air strikes intensified. Ali Habib told Amnesty International:

> *We first sheltered in an empty apartment in a four-storey building. At 3am the building opposite us was hit by an air strike and collapsed. Shrapnel was flying everywhere and my little boy and I were both injured by shrapnel. We were terrified. At 4am we tried to leave. Only my father's wife stayed because she could not move and one of her daughters stayed with her. My small car was destroyed in that bombing so I could not move my father's wife. My half-siblings decided to take shelter in a nearby building and me and my wife and our children and my mother went to Abu Saif (Fayad). We asked for shelter and Ammar told me that we could stay in his father's house (opposite Abu Saif's house). I knocked there and his father, Hussein, welcomed us.*
>
> *Shortly after we arrived there the bombing happened. I was sitting on a chair holding my little boy (five years old) and the women were sitting on the floor, huddled together. I felt the roof of the house collapse on me. I could not move and my little boy was not next to me anymore. I called Haj Hussein, then I called my wife, my mother, my daughter, but nobody answered. One of the neighbours who was sheltering in the house was lying next to me. He was barely alive and died almost immediately. I felt the roof of the house collapse on me... I called my wife, my mother, my daughter, but nobody answered… I realised that everybody was dead.*
>
> *I realised that everybody was dead. Then my boy, Mohammed, called out and that gave me the strength to free myself from the rubble and go to him. He had been thrown some 10m away by the explosion. We were both injured. I fainted and when I regained consciousness I heard voices on the other side of the rubble which was all around me and my boy and I called for help and eventually people removed some of the rubble and pulled us out. Later that day, at about 4pm, we heard that there would be another truce.*[72]

Ammar Amero, a neighbour of Abu Saif who was in the area and helped recover the bodies of Abu Saif and his family from the rubble, told Amnesty International:

> *When they [IS] broke the truce I was in a cellar with my family, relatives and neighbours around the corner and down the street from Abu Saif's house. I came out at 8.30-9am to see who had been killed and who needed help. In the street outside my house I met an Egyptian IS member who told me that the truce had been re-established and after three days we could all leave.*
>
> *A little further down the road I came across a civilian who told me that Abu Saif's house had been flattened to the ground. I was walking with a stick as I was disabled – it was a psychological condition I suffered after the death of my son. I hobbled around the corner and found the house flattened. There was a Syrian IS fighter in the street. He told me that he had come up out of a basement in order to pray at around 4.30am and that the house had not been hit then. It must have been the last house they hit before the bombardments stopped at 5am. I found the bottom half of Abu Saif in the rubble. Um Abdalla was also visible in the rubble but her legs were trapped under it. She was dead.*[73]

Those that were killed in Abu Saif's house are as follows:

1. Fayad Mohammed Saif (Abu Saif), over 80
2. Um Abdalla, 42 or 43 (Abu Saif's sister)
3. Wafa' Mohammed bint Fayad, late 40s (Abu Saif's daughter)
4. Fadda Mohammed bint Fayad, 40 (Abu Saif's daughter)
5. Tamam Mohammed bint Fayad 20 (Abu Saif's youngest daughter)

Those killed in the air strike that destroyed the house across the street from Abu Saif's house:

1. Hussein Hamad Faris Ibn Moussa, 60 (Abu Saif's brother-in-law)
2. Ammar Hamad Faris, 32 (Ammar's wife and child survived as they were out of Raqqa)

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[72] Interview with Ali Habib, near Raqqa, 14 February 2017.
[73] Interview with Ammar Amero, Raqqa, 11 February 2017.

3. Jasim Hamad Salem, 65 (Abu Saif's son-in-law, married to his daughter)
4. Salem Hamad Salem Ibn Jasim, 30-35 (Jasim's son)
5. Reem Maddad bint As'ad, 32 (Ali Habib's wife)
6. Razqiya Habib bint Ali, 18 months (Ali and Reem's daughter)
7. Yusra Abd- Aziz bint Ismail, 54 (Ali Habib's mother)
8. Abu Ibrahim
9. Abu Abdallah
10. Yassin
11. Neighbour (female)

THE STRIKES ON THE WATER POINTS

During the siege, which lasted several weeks, Harat al-Badu was subject to multiple air strikes, although they were not as intense as the night before the truce, when Abu Saif and his family were killed. The apartment block in which Ammar lived was damaged by an air strike, so he took shelter in a nearby basement with many other people. He told Amnesty International that on "*the second or third day of Eid"* [26-27 June 2017] an air strike killed 20-25 people, mainly civilians but some IS too, at a communal water point, around the corner from Abu Saif's house. As elsewhere, IS had installed taps in the street connected to a nearby well, where people – civilians and IS alike –went to fill their jerry cans before returning to their shelters. Ammar did not know the names of those killed as they had been brought to Harat al-Badu by IS from other areas.

A few weeks later, on Wednesday 16 August 2017, Ammar Amero's son Mirbat was killed by an air strike on another set of public taps a few streets away as he went to get water for the family. Ammar told Amnesty International:

> *A plane came and targeted the taps as there was a crowd there. The crowd was mixed between civilians and IS. Water was not available at the well every day and when it was available it would only come on for two hours at a time – from 8-10am and then again between 3-4pm. That's why there was a crowd at the well. When I came to the scene I found my son with a shrapnel wound in his shoulder. I took him to the National Hospital and waited two hours while he bled to death. They [IS] told us there were no doctors and no one with expertise.*[74]

Workmen are rebuilding the Fayad family home, which was destroyed in a Coalition air strike on 12 October 2017 in Raqqa. © Amnesty International

[74] Interview with Ammar Amero, Raqqa, 11 February 2017.

THE DEAL GRANTING IS FIGHTERS SAFE PASSAGE

> **"When we heard that there was a truce and we would be allowed to leave Raqqa, we thought this was for us, the civilians, but when the buses came we realised they were for Daesh."**
>
> Jamira, mother of two, trapped in Harat al-Badu

It seems the intense shelling the night between 11 and 12 October persuaded the surviving IS elements in Harat al-Badu to re-establish the truce with the SDF which had been broken the previous day. Residents told Amnesty International that around dawn on 12 October, IS fighters in Harat al-Badu informed civilians that the truce was in place and that everyone would soon be able to leave. This proved to be the case; shortly after, the SDF allowed everyone out of Harat al-Badu and out of Raqqa. They took all the remaining IS fighters – both the Syrians and the foreigners – and their families out on buses.

On 14 October, the Coalition issued the following statement:

> *A convoy of vehicles is staged to depart Raqqah Oct. 14 under an arrangement brokered by the Raqqah Civil Council and local Arab tribal elders Oct. 12. The arrangement is designed to minimise civilian casualties and purportedly excludes foreign Daesh terrorists as people trapped in the city continue to flee the impending fall of Daesh's so-called capital. People departing Raqqah under the arrangement are subject to search and screening by Syrian Democratic Forces. The Coalition was not involved in the discussions that led to the arrangement, but believes it will save innocent lives and allow Syrian Democratic Forces and the Coalition to focus on defeating Daesh terrorists in Raqqah with less risk of civilian casualties. We do not condone any arrangement that allows Daesh terrorists to escape Raqqah without facing justice, only to resurface somewhere else...*[75]

The title of the Coalition statement, "Raqqah Civil Council and Tribal Elders Arrange Civilian Evacuation to Reduce Civilian Casualties", is misleading in more ways than one. It refers only to the evacuation of civilians and does not mention the hundreds of IS fighters whose impunity and safe passage out of Raqqa was the primary condition for the evacuation of the civilians. It states that *"People departing Raqqah under the arrangement are subject to search and screening by Syrian Democratic Forces",* but fails to mention that IS fighters were allowed to take large quantities of weapons with them.[76]

The Coalition presented the deal as negotiated between the SDF and local tribal leaders, although Coalition representatives were reportedly present as the agreement was discussed.[77] It is difficult to imagine that the deal could have been concluded without the Coalition's agreement; as the only party with air power over the city and surrounding areas, the IS convoy's safe passage was dependent upon Coalition agreement not to attack it.

Furthermore, civilians who were trapped in Harat al-Badu until the end told Amnesty International that IS fighters were evacuated before the civilians. Jamila, a mother of two, said: *"When we heard that there was a truce and we would be allowed to leave Raqqa, we thought this was for us, the civilians, but then when the buses came we realised they were for Daesh. We had to make our own way out of the city. I couldn't believe it, but we were happy to get out by whatever means."*[78]

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[75] CJTF-OIR, "Raqqah Civil Council and Tribal Elders arrange civilian evacuation to reduce civilian casualties", 14 October 2017, available at http://www.inherentresolve.mil/News/News-Releases/News-Article-View/Article/1342879/raqqah-civil-council-and-tribal-elders-arrange-civilian-evacuation-to-reduce-ci/

[76] See *Raqqa's Dirty Secret*, by Quentin Sommerville and Riam Dalati, BBC, available at http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-sh/raqqas_dirty_secret

[77] According to Colonel Ryan Dillon, spokesperson for Operation Inherent Resolve, quoted in *Raqqa's Dirty Secret*, by Quentin Sommerville and Riam Dalati, BBC, available at http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-sh/raqqas_dirty_secret

[78] Interview with Jamila, Raqqa, 16 February 2017.

Satellite images showing the houses where 16 members of the Fayad family and neighbours were killed in Coalition strikes on 12 October 2017, before and after the strike.

Maha, a 20-year-old student, said: *"Me, my two sisters and my brother left with the Daesh convoy. We just followed the tail of the convoy because we did not want to miss the opportunity to get out the city. When we got out of Raqqa we went our own way."*[79]

COALITION REPORTING

The CJTF-OIR released the following information about strikes "Against ISIS Terrorists" in Raqqa on 12 October 2017. It reported carrying out a total of 29 strikes in Raqqa that day.

> *Near Ar Raqqah, 25 strikes engaged nine ISIS tactical units, suppressed one fighting position, destroyed two communications nodes, 10 fighting positions, one vehicle and one ISIS supply road.*[80]
>
> *Oct.12 – Near Raqqah, Syria, four strikes destroyed three ISIS lines of communication and one fighting position.*[81]

At least two of these strikes were from British aircraft. The British Ministry of Defence released the following information:

> *The SDF, supported by the Coalition, continue to make good progress towards the fall of Raqqah, having now cleared around 90% of the city. The RAF have played a pivotal role in this, striking 213 targets in and around Raqqah since the start of the SDF offensive. This included 2 Tornado GR4s providing close air support to the SDF in Raqqah on 12 October. A Paveway IV guided bomb was deployed to target the upper storeys of a building from which a Daesh sniper was firing, and a second weapon struck another building from which terrorists were engaged in a combat with the SDF.*[82]

The French Defence Ministry did not release information about its activities during the week of 12 October 2017.

[79] Interview with Maha, near Raqqa, 14 February 2017.
[80] Operation Inherent Resolve, "Strikes Releases – October 2017", 20171013 Strike Release.pdf, available at http://www.inherentresolve.mil/News/Strike-Releases/
[81] *Ibid*, 20171014 Strike.Release.pdf
[82] British Ministry of Defence, "RAF air strikes in Iraq and Syria: October 2017", available at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/british-forces-air-strikes-in-iraq-monthly-list/october-2017

5. JOINT COALITION-SDF MILITARY OPERATION IN RAQQA

CJTF-OIR has sought to present itself as an international Coalition with broad-based support from nations and institutions around the world. Referring to itself as "the Global Coalition", it boasts membership of 71 countries and four inter-governmental organisations; an eclectic alliance including nations as diverse as Panama and Poland, Australia and Afghanistan.[83] Some Coalition members, Chad or example, or Niger, are likely to have given support in name only. Others, particularly European states, were more deeply involved, although the exact extent of their actions is not always clear.

However, contrary to its motto, "One Mission, Many Nations", military action taken in the name of CJTF-OIR to wrest control of Raqqa from IS was an overwhelmingly US military affair. Throughout the battle, the staff of III Corps served as the headquarters element for CJTF-OIR at Camp Arifjan in Kuwait, and the campaign was led by a US three-star general, Lieutenant General Stephen Townsend; the US deployed some 2,000 of its own troops to north-eastern Syria, many of whom were engaged in direct combat operations, notably firing artillery into Raqqa from positions outside the city.[84] In addition, a smaller number of special forces were operating close to front lines alongside SDF members.[85] British and French special forces were also deployed to the area, but in much smaller numbers.

Among the US deployment were Army High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS) with GPS-directed 227mm rockets, which could be fired from 300km away,[86] as well as hundreds of Marines from the 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) and the 24th MEU equipped with M777 howitzers,[87] which they used to rain down 155mm artillery fire upon the city from a distance of up to 30km.[88] The US military was the only

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[83] Operation Inherent Resolve website, available at http://theglobalcoalition.org/en/partners/

[84] "According to military officials, there are approximately 2,000 U.S. troops in Syria, although the official Defense Department force level is set at 503 personnel. A Defense Manpower Data Center quarterly personnel report listed about 1,700 American troops in Syria as of Sept. 30, but Pentagon officials have described that report as a snapshot of force levels that are constantly varying", in *With Raqqa fight over, 400 US Marines leaving Syria*, ABC News, 30 November 2017, available at http://abcnews.go.com/International/raqqa-fight-400-us-marines-leaving-syria/story?id=51489623
and http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/12/06/pentagon-acknowledges-2000-troops-in-syria/.

[85] *"Coalition SOF are in Raqqa, and they are close to the front lines," said Col. Ryan Dillon, a spokesperson for the U.S.-led coalition battling ISIS in Syria and Iraq. The Americans are not 'kicking down doors,' Dillon added. Rather, their primary mission is to advise partner forces, though they are authorized to defend themselves."*, in "Boots on the ground: Elite U.S. troops are in Raqqa near the Islamic State's front line", *Military Times*, 9 June 2017 available at https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2017/06/09/boots-on-the-ground-elite-u-s-troops-are-in-raqqa-near-the-islamic-state-s-front-line/

[86] "US deploys long-range artillery system to southern Syria for first time", CNN, 13 June 2017, available at https://edition.cnn.com/2017/06/13/politics/us-artillery-system-southern-syria/index.html

[87] "New Marine artillery unit arrives in Syria ahead of Raqqa offensive", *Marine Times*, 16 May 2017, available at https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/your-marine-corps/2017/05/16/new-marine-artillery-unit-arrives-in-syria-ahead-of-raqqa-offensive/

[88] "Marine artillery barrage of Raqqa was so intense two howitzers burned out", *Marine Times*, 2 November 2017, available at https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/flashpoints/2017/11/02/marine-artillery-barrage-of-raqqa-was-so-intense-two-howitzers-burned-out/
Images from Syria have shown US Marines employing the low-cost XM1156 fuze kit, which turns regular high-explosive shells into GPS-guided projectiles. Reports that US forces fired HIMARS towards Raqqa, available at https://syria.liveuamap.com/en/2017/6-june-reports-that-ushimars-fired-6-rockets-towards-Raqqa

Coalition partner with artillery capacity during the battle for Raqqa and was therefore responsible for all artillery strikes into the city.

Despite a Coalition made up of over 70 nations, the only countries to conduct air strikes on and around Raqqa were the USA, Britain and France. The Coalition launched tens of thousands of strikes on Raqqa during the military campaign.[89] Of these, more than 4,000 were air strikes,[90] almost all of them carried out by US forces. British forces carried out some 215 air strikes, [91] while the French military was responsible for some 50 air strikes.[92] with the overwhelming majority – more than 90% – carried out by US piloted aircraft and drones. No other members of the Coalition are known to have carried out air strikes in Raqqa. At the same time, US Marines launched tens of thousands artillery shells into and around Raqqa.

The SDF provided the ground troops needed to push into the city on foot. They were armed with assault rifles, rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), and 120mm mortars, provided by the US.[93] They have no air power and are not known to have had artillery capacity during the Raqqa military operation. While Coalition forces operated mostly from positions several kilometres outside the city, a small number of special operation forces from Coalition member states – notably the US, UK and France – operated alongside the SDF close to front line position in/around the city, reportedly mostly in an advisory rather than combat role.[94]

The SDF were partly responsible for locating targets for Coalition air and artillery strikes. It is not clear what percentage of the Coalition air and artillery strikes were carried out based on co-ordinates provided by the SDF – as opposed to strikes on targets identified by Coalition forces themselves through air surveillance or other means – and the extent to which Coalition forces verified targets identified by the SDF prior to launching strikes on those targets.

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[89] Per CJTF-OIR methodology, strikes are carried out by *"fighter, attack, bomber, rotary-wing, or remotely piloted aircraft, rocket propelled artillery and ground-based tactical artillery,"* and are defined as *"one or more kinetic engagements that occur in roughly the same geographic location to produce a single, sometimes cumulative effect in that location. For example, a single aircraft delivering a single weapon against a lone ISIS vehicle is one strike, but so is multiple aircraft delivering dozens of weapons against a group of ISIS-held buildings and weapon systems in a compound"*, see: CJTF-OIR, Release 20171211-01, 11 December 2017, available at http://www.inherentresolve.mil/Portals/14/12Dec2017/20171211%20Strike%20Release.pdf?ver=2017-12-11-033135-847

[90] According to estimates by Airwars, based upon sorties/munitions statistics provided by AFCENT. See, for example, "They're still pulling the bodies out of ISIS' capital" by Samuel Oakford, in the Daily Beast, 12 March 2018, available at https://www.thedailybeast.com/theyre-still-pulling-bodies-out-of-isis-capital?ref=author and http://www.afcent.af.mil/Portals/82/Documents/Airpower%20summary/Airpower%20Summary%20-%20October%202017.pdf?ver=2017-11-21-034338-127 and http://www.afcent.af.mil/Portals/82/Documents/Airpower%20summary/Airpower%20Summary%20-%20August%202017.pdf?ver=2017-09-07-104037-223

[91] Information about the strikes carried out by British forces, published by the British Ministry of Defence, available at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/british-forces-air-strikes-in-iraq-monthly-list.

[92] Information about the strikes carried out by French forces, published by the French Ministère des Armées, available at https://www.facebook.com/notes/arm%C3%A9e-fran%C3%A7aise-op%C3%A9rations-militaires/point-de-situation-des-op%C3%A9rations/1434337239945330/

[93] Amnesty International researchers saw numerous fragments of American 120mm mortars used by the SDF all over Raqqa. SDF members confirmed to Amnesty International that they were using mostly US-supplied mortars. Also see: "They're still pulling the bodies out of ISIS' capital" by airwars.org's Samuel Oakford, 12 March 2018, the Daily Beast, available at https://www.thedailybeast.com/theyre-still-pulling-bodies-out-of-isis-capital?ref=author.

[94] "*Coalition SOF are in Raqqa, and they are close to the front lines," said Col. Ryan Dillon, a spokesperson for the U.S.-led coalition battling ISIS in Syria and Iraq*, in "Boots on the ground: Elite U.S. troops are in Raqqa near the Islamic State's front line", *Military Times*, 9 June 2017, available at https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2017/06/09/boots-on-the-ground-elite-u-s-troops-are-in-raqqa-near-the-islamic-state-s-front-line/

"SAS soldiers, who have been working with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in northern Syria, are understood to be on the ground in a supporting role", in "SAS helps launch dawn assault in final battle to capture Raqqa", The Times, 7 June 2017, available at https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/sas-help-launch-dawn-assault-as-final-push-on-raqqa-begins-9fg5fz385

"Syrie: Sylvie Goulard confirme la présence de forces spéciales françaises", Europe1, 26 May 2017, available at http://www.europe1.fr/politique/sylvie-goulard-nous-avons-des-forces-speciales-en-syrie-3341933

Unexploded MK 82 bomb, dropped by the Coalition, in a street in the centre of Raqqa. Months after the recapture of Raqqa unexploded munitions still littered Raqqa, in places where they posed a threat to civilians and where they could have easily been removed. *© Amnesty International*

Unexploded MK 82 bomb dropped by the Coalition, which was subsequently rigged by IS and turned into a large IED, surrounded by six mortars locally produced by IS. © Amnesty International

KEY WEAPONS USED IN RAQQA BY THE WARRING PARTIES

MK 82 AND MK 84 BOMBS
Manufacturers: US, UK, France
Users: US, UK, France
Net Explosive Weight: 199.5lb (90kg) / 992lb (450kg)[95]
Minimum Safe Distance: 584m / 997m[96]
Standard Mk 82 500lb bombs and Mk 84 2,000lb bombs can be fitted with Paveway II/IV kits to become laser-guided bombs, or JDAM tail kits to become GPS-guided weapons. Both bombs then have a circular error probable (CEP) of less than 5m.[97]

AGM-114 HELLFIRE GUIDED MISSILE
Manufacturer: US
User: US, UK
Net Explosive Weight: 10kg
Minimum Safe Distance: 280m
These guided missiles are the standard armament of MQ-1 Predator and MQ-9 Reaper drones.

M795 155MM ARTILLERY PROJECTILE
Manufacturer: US
User: US
Net Explosive Weight: 14.3kg
Minimum Safe Distance: 316m
Using M777 howitzers, the US fired 100% of the artillery rounds into Raqqa, the majority of which were unguided M795 high-explosive projectiles, with a CEP of over a hundred meters. Some of the M795s were fitted with M1156 Precision Guided Kits (PGKs), which reduce the CEP to 10m, but because they cost USD8,000 per kit, ten times the amount of a standard projectile fuze, few have been purchased by the US Army or Marine Corps, and they constituted a relatively small percentage of the weapons used.[98]

M934 120MM MORTARS
Manufacturer: US
User: SDF
Net Explosive Weight: 3kg
Minimum Safe Distance: 190m
The standard 120mm mortar of the US military, with a range of approximately four miles, these weapons were provided to the SDF for their use.[99] They can be identified by the M1020 ignition cartridges on the tail booms that survive detonation.

220MM MORTARS
Manufacturer: IS
User: IS
Net Explosive Weight: Approximately 9kg
Minimum Safe Distance: 270m
IS designed and manufactured these mortars in factories across their territory. They are often filled with a homemade explosive using precursors imported from Turkey.[100]In addition to the munitions highlighted above, Amnesty International researchers identified a variety of small arms and other weapons used by the combatants in Raqqa, including Yugoslavian M79 Osa rockets, M60 High-explosive Anti-tank (HEAT) recoilless rifles, and M74 120mm mortars; Soviet TM-62 anti-tank landmines, F-853U 160mm mortars, and 122mm artillery projectiles; and 81mm and 60mm mortars, PG-7 and PG-9 rocket-propelled grenades, and AK-pattern rifles from several countries.

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[95] All ordnance explosive weights, except where noted, available at ordata.info, a project of James Madison University's Center for International Stabilization and Recovery.
[96] Minimum safe distances calculated based upon the net explosive weight of the munition and a k-factor of 328, the "absolute safe distance" standard used by the US Department of Defense, available at https://www.dau.mil/cop/ammo/DAU%20Sponsored%20Documents/K%20Factor.pptx
[97] For JDAM, see http://www.af.mil/About-Us/Fact-Sheets/Display/Article/104572/joint-direct-attack-munition-gbu-313238/ , and for Paveway systems, see https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/systems/munitions/gbu-12.htm
[98] For an analysis of costs per fuze, and the numbers purchased by the Department of Defense, see https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/01/magazine/army-artillery-budget-howitzer.html
[99] See https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/systems/ground/m120-specs.htm
[100] Per conversation with Damien Spleeters, Head of Regional Operations in Iraq and Syria for Conflict Armament Research. CAR has documented the existence of the same IS mortars in Tal Afar and al Qa'im, and the extensive use of Turkish precursors in IS-manufactured weapons throughout their area of control. See: www.conflictarm.com/download-file/?report_id=2568&file_id=2574

6. COALITION RESPONSES TO CONCERNS OVER CIVILIAN CASUALTIES

> **"We are the good guys and the innocent people on the battlefield know the difference."[101]**
>
> James Mattis, US Defense Secretary

Officials representing CJTF-OIR led by the US have consistently failed to acknowledge the extent of the damage – human and material – wrought on the civilian population of Raqqa by the air and artillery strikes launched by Coalition forces, as have their civilian superiors. On the contrary, Coalition officials have repeatedly dismissed reports of civilian casualties as unfounded. Amnesty International has requested detailed information from CJTF-OIR about the strikes detailed in this report, and about all the strikes carried out by coalition forces, including exact dates, locations and munitions used, and about any investigations carried out so far. No response was received at the time of writing this report.

Nine days before the Coalition's Raqqa offensive began, on 28 May 2017, US Defense Secretary James Mattis appeared on national television in the US and called for a "war of annihilation" against IS.[102] When asked about civilian casualties he responded: *"Civilian casualties are a fact of life in this sort of situation… We do everything humanly possible consistent with military necessity, taking many chances to avoid civilian casualties at all costs."*[103] Eleven days after this statement US forces fired white phosphorus munitions over the Jezra intersection and the battle was underway.[104]

As mentioned earlier, Amnesty International's August 2017 report detailed its concerns about civilian casualties from seemingly disproportionate or otherwise indiscriminate Coalition attacks, notably artillery

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[101] *"Coalition SOF are in Raqqa, and they are close to the front lines," said Col. Ryan Dillon, a spokesperson for the U.S.-led coalition battling ISIS in Syria and Iraq*, in "Boots on the ground: Elite U.S. troops are in Raqqa near the Islamic State's front line", *Military Times*, 9 June 2017, available at https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2017/06/09/boots-on-the-ground-elite-u-s-troops-are-in-raqqa-near-the-islamic-state-s-front-line/
"SAS soldiers, who have been working with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in northern Syria, are understood to be on the ground in a supporting role", in "SAS helps launch dawn assault in final battle to capture Raqqa", *The Times*, 7 June 2017, available at https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/sas-help-launch-dawn-assault-as-final-push-on-raqqa-begins-9fg5fz385
"Syrie: Sylvie Goulard confirme la présence de forces spéciales françaises", Europe1, 26 May 2017, available at http://www.europe1.fr/politique/sylvie-goulard-nous-avons-des-forces-speciales-en-syrie-3341933 (in French).
[102] "Fight against ISIS has shifted to 'annihilation tactics'", by Kathyrn Watson, *CBS News*, 28 May 2017, available at https://www.cbsnews.com/news/fight-against-isis-has-shifted-to-annihilation-tactics-mattis-says/.
[103] US Secretary of State James Mattis, quoted in "Defense Secretary Mattis says US policy against IS is now 'annihilation'", *The Guardian*, 28 May 2017, available at https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/may/28/james-mattis-defense-secretary-us-isis-annihilation
[104] Amnesty International, Press Release, 16 June 2017, available at https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/06/syria-expert-analysis-shows-usled-coalition-use-of-white-phosphorus-may-amount-to-war-crime/

strikes, at the time that the military operation was still under way.[105] A Coalition official dismissed the concerns raised by Amnesty International and by the UN Special Advisor on Syria, who had called for a pause in hostilities to allow civilians out of the city.[106] The Commander of Coalition forces, Lieutenant General Stephen Townsend acknowledged that, after an escalation in attacks, *"it is logical to assume there has been some increase in civilian casualties"*, before going on to cast doubt over Amnesty International's findings, saying, *"I would ask someone to show me hard information."*[107] He further stated: *"I think we are being as careful as we need to be and as we can be, and I would challenge the individual from the UN who made this hyperbolic statement that civilian casualties are staggering. Show me some evidence of that."*[108] US Defense Secretary James Mattis' only response was: *"We are the good guys and the innocent people on the battlefield know the difference."*[109]

Destroyed neighbourhood in Raqqa. © Amnesty International

Following this in September 2017 and at the height of conflict in Raqqa, Lieutenant General Stephen Townsend wrote that *"… there has never been a more precise air campaign in the history of armed conflict"*,[110] repeating a claim he had made at the start of the Raqqa campaign.[111] He went on to claim that reports of civilian casualties *"…are often unsupported by fact and serve only to strengthen the Islamic State's hold on civilians, placing civilians at greater risk… Our critics are unable to conduct the detailed assessments the Coalition does. They arguably often rely on scant information phoned-in or posted by questionable sources."*[112]

A change of leadership does not appear to have brought a change of attitudes. In September 2017 Lieutenant General Stephen Townsend was replaced as Coalition commander by Lieutenant General Paul E. Funk II. In a December 2017 interview Lieutenant General Funk II also defended the accuracy of the air

[105] *"I won't forget this carnage": Civilians trapped in the fight for Raqqa – Syria*, Amnesty International, 24 August 2017, available at https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/08/syria-deadly-labyrinth-traps-civilians-trying-to-flee-raqqa/
[106] "No 'worse place on earth' than Syria's Raqqa, says senior UN advisor urging for pause in fighting", UN News, 24 August 2017, available at https://news.un.org/en/story/2017/08/563802-no-worse-place-earth-syrias-raqqa-says-senior-un-adviser-urging-pause-fighting.
[107] Quoted by Al Jazeera in "Civilians in Raqqa under fire 'from all sides': Amnesty", 24 August 2017, available at https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/08/civilians-raqqa-fire-sides-amnesty-170824004428242.html
[108] CJTF-OIR Commanding General Stephen Townsend in "Syria war: Why the battle for Raqqa is far from won", BBC, 30 June 2017, available at http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-40451093
[109] *Ibid.*
[110] "Reports of civilian casualties in the war against ISIS are vastly inflated", Foreign Policy, 15 September 2017, available at http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/09/15/reports-of-civilian-casualties-from-coalition-strikes-on-isis-are-vastly-inflated-lt-gen-townsend-cjtf-oir/
[111] "*I would challenge anyone to find a more precise and careful campaign in the history of warfare on this planet"*, CJTF-OIR Commanding General Stephen Townsend to the BBC, 30 June 2017, available at http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-40451093
[112] "Reports of civilian casualties in the war against ISIS are vastly inflated", Foreign Policy, 15 September 2017, available at http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/09/15/reports-of-civilian-casualties-from-coalition-strikes-on-isis-are-vastly-inflated-lt-gen-townsend-cjtf-oir/

campaign, claiming that Coalition forces take *"immense steps"* to prevent civilian casualties. The General went on to blame IS for hiding amongst civilians, saying, *"When the enemy uses civilians as human shields, it's incredibly hard not to have civilian casualties. Our procedures are sound."*[113]

The UK government, meanwhile, continues to be in denial about the realities of conducting air strikes in populated urban settings.[114] On 8 January 2018, in response to a question by a Member of Parliament about *"the number of civilian casualties in Syria as a result of UK air strikes",* the Ministry of Defence responded that:

> *In carrying out air strikes, expert analysts routinely examine data from every UK strike to assess its effect… We co-operate fully with NGOs such as Airwars, who provide evidence they gather of civilian casualties. After detailed work on each case, we have been able to discount RAF involvement in any civilian casualties as a result of any of the strikes that have been brought to our attention.*[115]

These statements fail to recognise that it is the Coalition's investigation methodology which is deficient, for it does not include visits to the sites of the alleged strikes or interviews with witnesses or survivors and their families. Even though since the end of September 2017 CJTF-OIR monthly casualty reports contain wording indicating an improvement in its methodology to include "site visits and interviews with witnesses, where possible",[116] such provisions do not appear to have yet been implemented. Site visits are a crucial element of investigations as they provide the opportunity to examine munition impact and pattern of destruction at the concerned location and in surrounding areas, observation of munition fragments and other material which can contribute to understanding of the dynamics at the time of the strike. Interviews with survivors, witnesses and relatives of victims are equally crucial for understanding events leading up to and during the strikes. Furthermore, site visits are necessary to proactively discover information about strikes which may not been brought to the Coalition's attention having not been reported by media or other sources.

The Coalition relies upon a "preponderance of evidence" test in order to determine whether an allegation that it harmed a civilian is credible or not.[117] The Coalition lists most allegations that it caused civilian casualties as "non-credible". So far in 2018, for example, CJTF-OIR has published the results of 452 "reviews of facts and circumstances" into allegations that it caused civilian casualties mainly in 2017.[118] Of these, only 19 were deemed credible.[119] The remaining 433 were deemed "non-credible";[120] a rate of 95.62%. The low credibility count suggests that some, possibly many, allegations may be dismissed before all necessary efforts are deployed to investigate them. Undercounting civilian casualties could result in underestimating potential harm to civilians in future Coalition operations, as civilian casualty mitigation procedures require military units to learn from their civilian casualty assessments and incorporate that learning into planning future operations.[121]

During its field investigation in Raqqa, Amnesty International delegates visited dozens of Coalition strike sites in every district in the city and spoke to more than 100 residents who had survived or witnessed Coalition strikes. None of them had been interviewed or contacted by Coalition forces' investigators, neither in Raqqa nor while they were in camps for displaced persons prior to their return to the city; nor were any of them

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[113] Lieutenant General Paul E. Funk II quoted in "*Fort Hood General leading ISIS fight says caliphate defeated in Iraq*", *Statesman*, 28 December 2017, available at https://www.statesman.com/news/local-military/fort-hood-general-leading-isis-fight-says-caliphate-defeated-iraq/OBA9pIVKjsXqYPz9bEYnzK/

[114] The UK has a long history of denying causing civilian deaths with its air strikes against the co-called IS. Back in 2016 it released information following a Freedom of Information request, claiming to have killed almost 1,000 IS fighters in Iraq and Syria in 1,000 strikes carried out between September 2014 and March 2016 and not a single civilian. See, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/iraq-syria-air-strikes-civilians-casualties-killed-isis-daesh-islamic-state-air-wars-a70082276.html

[115] Syria: Military Intervention: Written question – 120695, UK Parliament website, available at https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2017-12-20/120695/
On 2 May 2018, the UK government for the first time admitted that one of its air strikes in March 2018 in Syria had caused one civilian casualty. See, "Syria war: MoD admits civilian died in RAF strike on Islamic State", BBC, 2 May 2018, available at http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-43977394

[116] CJTF-OIR, "Monthly civilian casualty report", 29 September 2017, available at http://www.inherentresolve.mil/News/News-Releases/News-Article-View/Article/1329201/cjtf-oir-monthly-civilian-casualty-report/

[117] US Airforce Major Shane Huff in his capacity as Media Operations Officer at CENTCOM Communications Interrogation Directorate, in an email entitled "Inquiry regarding DoD investigations into allegations of civilian harm in Iraq", 2 November 2016, available at https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/4416019-Assessments.html
"Legal implications of the defect in Pentagon's civilian casualty assessments", by Ryan Goodman, 26 April 2018, Just Security, available at https://www.justsecurity.org/55397/legal-implications-defect-pentagons-civilian-casualty-assessments/

[118] See "CJTF-OIR Monthly Reports" containing each month a list of allegations deemed "non-credible" and available at http://www.inherentresolve.mil/News/News-Releases/

[119] *Ibid* – Six allegations were deemed credible in January 2018, four in February 2018, six in March 2018 and three in April 2018.

[120] *Ibid* – 207 allegations were deemed non-credible in January 2018, 102 in February 2018, 78 in March 2018 and 46 in April 2018.

[121] For example, see the US Army's "Civilian casualty mitigation cycle", July 2012, available at https://www.globalsecurity.org/jhtml/jframe.html#https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/policy/army/attp/attp3-37-31.pdf|||ATTP%203-37.31:%20Civilian%20Casualty%20Mitigation

aware of any Coalition investigators having visited any strike sites anywhere in the city or having interviewed survivors or witnesses of other strikes. Such shortcomings in the investigation methodology appear to be a significant contributing factor to its dismissal of almost all the reports of civilian fatalities and casualties.[122]

Children riding a bicycle among destroyed buildings in Raqqa. © Amnesty International

[122] *"The Coalition conducted a total of 29,070 strikes between August 2014 and January 2018. During this period, the total number of reports of possible civilian casualties was 2,015. The total number of credible reports of civilian casualties during this time period was 218."* The figures refer to the total number of acknowledged Coalition strikes in all locations in Iraq and Syria. There is no specific report just for Raqqa. CJTF-OIR "Monthly civilian casualty report", February 22 2018, available at http://www.inherentresolve.mil/News/News-Releases/News-Article-View/Article/1447350/cjtf-oir-monthly-civilian-casualty-report/

7. DIRE HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

> **"Why were those who spent to so much on a costly military campaign which destroyed the city not providing the relief so desperately needed?"[123]**
>
> Raqqa residents

Eight months on from the end the military campaign, most of Raqqa's residents remain displaced. Those who have returned live in dire conditions among the rubble and the stench of corpses trapped beneath. Unexploded ordnance litter the city and continues to kill and injure residents. At the time of writing, some 100,000 people had returned to Raqqa since the end of hostilities in October 2017, despite the danger posed by unexploded ordnance – mostly IEDs left by IS fighters, but also unexploded munitions dropped by Coalition forces – rendering the city unsafe.

Virtually every returnee that Amnesty International interviewed in Raqqa posed a simple question: why were those who spent to so much on a costly military campaign which destroyed the city not providing the relief so desperately needed? Chief among their priorities was the provision of equipment needed to recover the bodies and remove the explosive devices trapped in the rubble. Coalition officials have so far failed to acknowledge the extent of the damage wrought on the city mostly by Coalition strikes.

The wholesale destruction wrought upon every almost street in Raqqa as a result of artillery and air strikes stands in stark contrast to Coalition claims about precision strikes.[124] UN experts, Amnesty International's researchers who conducted the investigation, and seasoned war correspondents found the level of destruction in Raqqa worse than anything previously witnessed in other wars.[125] In April the UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency stated that *"the UN team entering Raqqa city were shocked by the level of destruction, which exceeded anything they had never seen before"*.[126]

"The liberation of Raqqa… is not the end. It is actually the start of the process. The real healing starts once the fighting is over," promised Major General Rupert Jones, CJTF-OIR Deputy Commander, as the battle to oust IS gathered momentum in July 2017.[127] Since combat's end, however, the humanitarian assistance

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[123] These were sentiments that many Raqqa residents expressed to Amnesty International during interviews on the ground in Raqqa during February 2018.
[124] "Reports of civilian casualties in the war against ISIS are vastly inflated", Foreign Policy, 15 September 2017, available at http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/09/15/reports-of-civilian-casualties-from-coalition-strikes-on-isis-are-vastly-inflated-lt-gen-townsend-cjtf-oir/
[125] *"24 hours of coverage still wouldn't do justice to the total devastation across Raqqa. I've never seen anything like it"*. BBC correspondent Quentin Sommerville, 17 September 2017, available at https://twitter.com/sommervilletv/status/909456790223540229?lang=en
[126] "First UN humanitarian mission to Raqqa city post-ISIS", UNHCR, 5 April 2018, available at http://www.unhcr.org/sy/11607-first-un-humanitarian-mission-raqqa-city-post-isis.html and *"The team observed an extremely high level of destruction, with nearly 70 per cent of buildings destroyed or damaged"*, "Syria Crisis: Northeast Syria", Situation Report No. 23 (15 March – 15 April 2018), UN OCHA, 18 April 2018, available at https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/whole-of-syria/document/syria-crisis-north-east-syria-situation-report-no-23-15-march-%E2%80%93
[127] Rupert Jones discussing the battle for Raqqa, ArtaFmRadio, 24 July, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XJzQ3B1AIW0

residents hoped for has mostly not materialised. While some infrastructure repair projects are being carried out with international aid, residents lament not receiving help to overcome their losses. During Amnesty International's visit in February 2018, families across the city complained that corpses had still not been recovered from the rubble of bombed buildings. Following an assessment of humanitarian needs conducted in early April, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, OCHA, noted the *"large-scale destruction throughout the city, a critical level of explosive hazard contamination amidst insufficient resources for surveying and removal of explosive hazards, as well as a shortage of public services"*.[128]

LETHAL LEGACY: UNEXPLODED ORDNANCE

> **"I'd rather get killed by a mine than watch my children crying every day because they are hungry."[129]**
>
> Roula, a woman scavenger in the rubble of buildings around the National Hospital

The number of mines and IEDs IS laid in homes, shops, public buildings and roads has been described by US officials as unprecedented.[130] Many of these, as well as unexploded bombs dropped by Coalition forces, continue to contaminate the city, with the clearing process set to continue for months, if not years. In the meantime, mines/IEDs continue to pose a lethal danger, causing death and injury to civilians every day. Particularly at risk are the men and boys who work as casual labourers clearing the rubble from damaged house and shops, and the women and children who scavenge through the rubble for scrap metal and other material to sell.

Ayman, a 14-year-old boy who works as a daily labourer clearing rubble from damaged houses for SYP2,000 to SYP3,000 a day (approximately USD4-6), told Amnesty International that one of his friends, also a child, had been killed the previous week earlier doing the same work: *"His name was Mohammed. He was working clearing the rubble from a house in the Hadiqa al-Baida neighbourhood and a mine in the rubble exploded and he died. He was the same age as me. What can we do? We have to work."*[131] Roula, a woman who was collecting light metal in the rubble of buildings around the National Hospital with two of her children, aged seven and nine, told Amnesty International: *"What can I do? I have three younger children and we have nothing to eat. I'd rather get killed by a mine than watch my children crying every day because they are hungry."*[132]

The previous day, on 14 February 2017, another woman, Umm Anas, a mother of eight, was seriously injured in an explosion in the same area as she was collecting scrap metal. Her husband told Amnesty International that he did not know whether she was alive or dead. He was informed that she had been taken to hospital in Tal Abyad, but he could not afford to travel there. With no working telephone lines in Raqqa, he had no way of contacting the hospital to inquire about her condition.[133]

According to local medical workers, more than 1,000 people, many of them children, have been injured or killed by mines between October 2017 and April 2018, though the actual number of victims is likely higher, as those who died before reaching medical assistance are not necessarily accounted for.[134]

The international medical organisation Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF – Doctors without Borders), which has a clinic in Raqqa city, continues to receive large numbers of victims of blast-related injuries.[135]

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[128] "Syria Crisis: Northeast Syria", Situation Report No. 23 (15 March – 15 April 2018), UN OCHA, 18 April 2018, available at https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/whole-of-syria/document/syria-crisis-north-east-syria-situation-report-no-23-15-march-%E2%80%93

[129] Interview with Roula, Raqqa, 15 February 2018.

[130] *"The number of unexploded ordnance in Raqqa is something that we have never seen before"*, Panos Moumtzis, UN Assistant Secretary-General and Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria Crisis, quoted in "Refugees in Syria's Raqqa face 'extreme' IS landmine threat: U.N.", Reuters, 6 February 2018, available at https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-raqqa/refugees-in-syrias-raqqa-face-extreme-is-landmine-threat-u-n-idUSKBN1FQ2H4

[131] Interview with Ayman, Raqqa,15 February 2018.

[132] Interview with Roula, Raqqa, 15 February 2018.

[133] Interview with Abu Anas, Raqqa,16 February 2018.

[134] "Syrians are returning to homes in Raqqa littered with land mines, but the U.S. may cut funds for clearing the city", The Intercept, 1 May 2018, available at https://theintercept.com/2018/05/01/syria-isis-defeat-landmines-humanitarian-aid/ ; and "Syria: Landmines kill, injure hundreds in Raqqa; More international support needed for clearance", Human Rights Watch, 12 February 2018, available at https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/02/12/syria-landmines-kill-injure-hundreds-raqqa

[135] "Syria: 33 blast victims treated by MSF in Raqqa in the first week of 2018", MSF, January 2018, available at

Children scavenging for scrap metal in the rubble of destroyed buildings in Raqqa, where many of the buildings were mined by IS and where children and adults are frequently killed and injured by mines. © Amnesty International

Daily labourers and scavengers are sometimes referred to as "unofficial de-miners" because they risk their lives working in the rubble of bombed-out buildings which may be mined. A local businessman told Amnesty International:

> *People need to get back to whatever is left of their homes and businesses but nobody is clearing the mines. If you have money you can hire labourers and if there are mines they are the ones who get killed. Everybody knows about the danger from the mines but people need to work. People have lost everything and they will do any job to feed their children. Unfortunately, this is life in Raqqa today. I was able to rent a bulldozer to clear the rubble from the half of my house which was destroyed. But it is expensive and most people cannot afford it.*[136]

Raqqa Civil Council (RCC) is the body tasked with co-ordinating the administration of the city and surrounding areas, which are outside Syrian government control. RCC officials told Amnesty International that they lack the funds necessary to address even the destroyed city's most basic needs. Laila Mustafa, the co-chair of the RCC told the organisation:

> *Residents come to us every day asking us to recover the bodies of their relatives trapped in the rubble of destroyed buildings but we only have very few bulldozers and mostly not of the right kind, so we cannot satisfy most of these requests. We need equipment for lifting large quantity of heavy rubble full of mines and we just don't have it.* [137]

http://www.msf.org/en/article/syria-33-blast-victims-treated-msf-raqqa-first-week-2018 and "Syria: Patient numbers double in northeast as more people return home to landmines", MSF, 3 April 2018, available at http://www.msf.org/en/article/syria-patient-numbers-double-northeast-more-people-return-home-landmines

[136] Interview, with Abu Ali, Raqqa, 16 February 2018.

[137] Interview with Laila Mustafa, Ain Issa, 6 February 2018.

Men wait by the side of the road for casual labour in Raqqa. Many end up clearing partially destroyed or damaged buildings, a very risky endeavour as many building were mined by IS and civilians are frequently killed and injured by mines. © Amnesty International

Statements made by US representatives have not always been promising. In April 2018 the US State Department's Jerry Guilbert said, in response to a journalist's question: *"… we never went into this from the beginning with the view that the international community was going to clear Raqqa or clear Syria. Ultimately, this has to be viewed as a Syrian problem that is in need of a Syrian solution."*[138] Jerry Guilbert is Chief of Programs for the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs at the US Department of State.

Another leading RCC member told *The Wall Street Journal* in March 2018 that the USA had done *"practically nothing"* to repair Raqqa since the end of the military operation. Funds were slow to arrive and when they did, the projects proposed by USAID, the US Agency for International Development, such as repainting curbs, were out of step with local needs.[139] Amnesty International delegates also witnessed similarly superfluous, out of sync internationally funded activities in Raqqa, including smartly uniformed traffic police directing non-existent traffic at semi-deserted intersections and labourers sweeping dust into neat piles from streets flanked by mountains of uncleared rubble. Residents' complaints about the failure of these projects to meet their needs seem well founded.

POST-BATTLE LOOTING

Immediately after the battle the SDF emptied Raqqa of its remaining residents. With no one around to protect it, property was looted on a large scale. *"What was not destroyed during the war was looted after liberation,"* Hassan, a household goods trader, told Amnesty International. He said that his house and adjacent shop and storeroom were cleaned out completely after he left Raqqa.

> *Daesh stole plenty from us earlier on, but during the battle they had other priorities. I left Raqqa a few days before the end of the battle and at that time there is no way that Daesh would have been able to take away such material – dozens of fridges, freezers, washing machines etc. I tried coming*

[138] "Briefing on U.S. demining efforts around the world", 4 April 2018, available at https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2018/04/280216.htm
[139] "How American neglect imperils the victory over ISIS", *The Wall Street Journal*, 19 April 2018, available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2018/world/syria/raqqa-residents-abandoned-and-forgotten/?utm_term=.511861fb4cbc

back to Raqqa immediately after the battle but the SDF did not allow residents back then because they said there were mines planted by Daesh. But now, after everything has been looted, residents are allowed to come back even though there are still mines everywhere and people get blown up every other day by these mines.[140]

A shop selling household goods in the midst of destroyed buildings in Raqqa. Many business people, complain that their shops and warehouses were looted after they left the city. *© Amnesty International*

Looting of whatever had not been destroyed by the bombardments and the fighting seems to have been routine in the areas recaptured from IS throughout Raqqa and beyond. Most Raqqa residents Amnesty International interviewed reported that their properties – homes as well as businesses – were looted. They blamed SDF members both for looting and for allowing others to loot.[141] In the words of Abu Rami, a resident of one of the city's central neighbourhoods:

> *It was well known that Daesh were thieves but we did not expect those who came to liberate us from Daesh to steal as well. Daesh took the property of those who left the city and charged residents all sort of taxes but at the end they gave up as they were focused on saving themselves, or fighting to their death. The SDF came in and for weeks they did not allow us to return. When we did come back, we found that everything had been stolen. The SDF looted and allowed others to loot. They should take responsibility for this. We see our stuff being sold in markets here and there. It is wrong. They should take responsibility for this and do something about it.*

Residents of several areas of Raqqa told Amnesty International that they have set up informal neighbourhood watch committees, with groups of residents taking turns to watch over homes and businesses to prevent further looting. Residents also complained that daytime SDF checkpoints at major intersections around the city are easily circumvented by thieves, who operate freely at night when the streets are almost deserted and the security presence melts away.

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[140] Interview with Hassan, Raqqa, 15 February 2018.

[141] Reports of looting by SDF soldiers began to emerge soon after Raqqa was recaptured. See, for example, https://twitter.com/24Raqqa/status/928228752768798720 At the beginning of the Raqqa military campaign, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed concern about human rights abuses, including looting, by SDF members in areas they recaptured from IS. See, for example, "Civilians must not be sacrificed for military victories – UN rights chief, as thousands trapped in Raqqa", UN News, 28 June 2017, available at https://news.un.org/en/story/2017/06/560502-civilians-must-not-be-sacrificed-military-victories-un-rights-chief-thousands

8. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The evidence Amnesty International gathered in Raqqa in February 2018 and included in this report establishes that Coalition air strikes killed and injured civilians in Raqqa. It also provides evidence that other types of attacks, including Coalition artillery fire, and mortar fire from both the SDF and IS, also killed and injured civilians – although mortar fire casualties are more difficult to attribute to one party to conflict or another. Amnesty International also documented civilian casualties from IS laid mines/IEDs that continue to kill and maim civilians in Raqqa), as well as IS snipers who fired deliberately upon civilians who were attempting to escape.

International humanitarian law (IHL), or the laws of war, sets out legal rules that bind all parties to armed conflict, whether state armed forces or non-state armed groups. These rules, the most relevant of which to these cases are explained below, aim to minimise human suffering in war, and offer particular protection to civilians and those who are not directly participating in hostilities. In situations of armed conflict, not all civilian casualties will be unlawful. However, deaths and injuries of civilians are an indication that something has gone wrong. This could be the result of a violation of the rules, even of criminal wrongdoing; or it could be the result of an accident, mistake or malfunction of a weapons system, or the incidental result of a lawful attack. Investigation is necessary to make these determinations, ensure accountability in the case of violations and take measures to avoid unnecessary harm to civilians.

The cases presented in this report, based on the findings and analysis of Amnesty International, raise a very strong possibility that civilians were killed and injured (and civilian objects were destroyed or damaged) in violation of international humanitarian law. Amnesty International has written to the Coalition seeking additional information about these cases and about other attacks and raising questions about Coalition tactics, specific means and methods of attack, choice of targets, and precautions taken in planning and execution of attacks. Such information is necessary for a full assessment of the Coalition's assertions about its compliance with international humanitarian law. Transparency on the Coalition's part is a sine qua non of ensuring accountability and securing justice and reparation for civilians harmed as a result of violations. In addition to being a legal obligation, investigation of reported violations is also imperative for militaries to learn how to improve respect for IHL, a matter of life and death for civilians caught up in urban fighting.

APPLICABLE INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

The Coalition and IS are party to the armed conflict in Syria. There is some disagreement as to what type of armed conflict: international or non-international. The Coalition is carrying out attacks in Syria without the consent of the government of Syria. In that sense, this is an international armed conflict. However, the fighting between the Coalition and IS, a non-state armed group, is a non-international armed conflict.

The USA is a party to the four Geneva Conventions of 1949. The UK and France are also party to these Conventions as well as to their three Additional Protocols. In any event, most of the rules on the conduct of hostilities of IHL, including all those cited in this report, apply in both international and non-international armed conflict and are binding on all parties, state and non-state forces.[142]

[142] For an authoritative list of these rules see International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Customary International Humanitarian Law: Volume 1: Rules, J-M Henckaerts and L Doswald-Beck, eds, 2005 (hereinafter: ICRC, Customary IHL Study).

THE PRINCIPLE OF DISTINCTION

The principle of distinction is one of the cornerstones of international humanitarian law. This requires parties to conflict to at all times, "distinguish between civilians and combatants" and to ensure that "attacks may only be directed against combatants" and "must not be directed against civilians".[143] Parties to conflict must also distinguish between "civilian objects" and "military objectives". Anyone who is not a member of the armed forces of a party to the conflict is a civilian, and the civilian population comprises all persons who are not combatants.[144] Civilians are protected against attack unless and for such time as they take a direct part in hostilities.[145] In cases of doubt, individuals should be presumed to be civilians and immune from direct attack.[146] Making the civilian population, or individual civilians not taking a direct part in hostilities, the object of attack (direct attacks on civilians) is a war crime.[147]

Civilian objects are all objects which are not "military objectives", and military objectives are "limited to those objects which by their nature, location, purpose or use make an effective contribution to military action and whose partial or total destruction, capture or neutralisation, in the circumstances ruling at the time, offers a definite military advantage".[148] Civilian objects are protected against attack, unless and for such time as they become military objectives because all of the criteria for a military objective just described become temporarily fulfilled.[149] In cases of doubt, parties to conflict are required to presume the building retains its civilian nature.[150] Making civilian objects the object of attack is a war crime.[151]

Indiscriminate attacks are prohibited.[152] Indiscriminate attacks may strike military objectives and civilians or civilian objects without distinction, either because the attack is not directed at a specific military objective, or because it employs a method or means of combat that cannot be directed at a specific military objective or has effects that cannot be limited as required by IHL.[153] Launching an indiscriminate attack resulting in death or injury to civilians is a war crime.[154]

Most of the cases examined in this report involved attacks that struck civilian objects – homes or other places in which civilians were seeking shelter from the fighting – killing and injuring civilians. Witnesses reported that there were no fighters in the vicinity at the time of the attacks. Such attacks could be either direct attacks on civilians or civilian objects or indiscriminate attacks.

In the case of air strikes that used precision-guided munitions, the objects struck were the ones that were targeted. This raises questions about whether the intelligence used for selecting targets was unreliable or out of date. It also raises questions about why those planning these attacks were not aware of the presence of large numbers of civilians, or if they were, why they decided to proceed in the way they did. Given the fact that IS had already been routinely preventing civilians in areas under their control from fleeing and were even deliberately using them as human shields, the likelihood that large numbers of civilians were in the area should have been evident to the Coalition. Using munitions with very large payloads, even when precisely delivered, was guaranteed to kill and injure civilians in the immediate vicinity. And when civilian homes were directly hit by such air strikes, the consequences were devastating.

In the case of deaths and injuries to civilians resulting from artillery strikes or mortar fire, these would appear to be indiscriminate attacks. The repeated use of imprecise explosive weapons, such as these, in the vicinity of civilians is a reckless tactic that violates the prohibition of indiscriminate attacks. If at the outset the Coalition was not aware that using artillery in this manner in Raqqa city would lead to needless deaths and injuries to civilians (which in itself is implausible given the experience of fighting IS in Mosul), it should have very quickly learned this lesson and changed its tactics.

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[143] ICRC, Customary IHL Study, Rule 1. See also Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), Article 48, and Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II), Article 12(2).
[144] ICRC, Customary IHL Study, Rule 5; see also Protocol I, Article 50.
[145] ICRC, Customary IHL Study, Rule 6; see also Protocol I, Article 51(3); Protocol II, Article 13(3).
[146] Protocol I, Article 50(1).
[147] ICRC, Customary IHL, Rule 156, p. 591.
[148] ICRC, Customary IHL Study, Rules 8 and 9; Protocol I, Article 52.
[149] ICRC, Customary IHL Study, Rule 10.
[150] Protocol I, Article 52(3). See also ICRC, Customary IHL Study, pp. 34-36.
[151] ICRC, Customary IHL Study, Rule 156, pp. 591, 593, 595-598. See also Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Articles 8(2)(b)(i) and (ii) and 8(2)(e)(i)(ii)(iv) and (xii). See also discussion in ICRC, Customary IHL Study, p. 27.
[152] ICRC, Customary IHL Study, Rule 11; Protocol I, Article 51(4).
[153] ICRC, Customary IHL Study, Rule 12; Protocol I, Article 51(4)(a).
[154] ICRC, Customary IHL, rule 156, p. 599.

PROPORTIONALITY

The principle of proportionality, another fundamental tenet of IHL, also prohibits disproportionate attacks, which are those "which may be expected to cause incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians, damage to civilian objects, or a combination thereof, which would be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated".[155] Intentionally launching a disproportionate attack (that is, knowing that the attack will cause excessive incidental civilian loss, injury or damage) constitutes a war crime.[156] The Commentary on the Additional Protocols makes clear that the fact that the proportionality calculus requires an anticipated "concrete and direct" military advantage indicates that such advantage must be "substantial and relatively close, and that advantages which are hardly perceptible and those which would only appear in the long term should be disregarded."[157]

PRECAUTIONS

In order for parties to an armed conflict to respect the principles of distinction and proportionality they must take precautions in attack. "Constant care must be taken to spare the civilian population, civilians and civilian objects"; "all feasible precautions" must be taken to avoid and minimise incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians and damage to civilian objects.[158] The parties must choose means and methods of warfare with a view to avoiding or at least minimising to the maximum extent possible incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians and damage to civilian objects.[159] As well as verifying the military nature of targets and assessing the proportionality of attacks, the parties must also take all feasible steps to call off attacks which appear wrongly directed or disproportionate.[160] Parties must give effective advance warning of attacks which may affect the civilian population, unless circumstances do not permit.[161] When a choice is possible between several military objectives for obtaining a similar military advantage, the parties must select the target the attack on which would be expected to pose the least danger to civilians and to civilian objects.[162]

The limited information available on the precautions in attack taken by the Coalition suggests that they were not adequate or effective. The cases examined in detail indicate that there were serious shortcomings in verification that targets selected for attack were in fact military, with disastrous results for civilian life. Further, several attacks examined by Amnesty International suggest that the Coalition did not, at least in those instances, select weapons that would minimise harm to civilians. Also, the warnings that were given to civilians were not effective. They did not take into account the reality that civilians were blocked from leaving Raqqa, and did not include specific information (such as warning civilians to stay away from tall buildings).

JOINT AND INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY OF COALITION MEMBERS

Although the US is estimated to have carried out the overwhelming majority of the air strikes in Raqqa as well as 100% of artillery strikes, British and French planes also carried out air strikes on the city.[163] Due, in part, to the deliberate vagueness with which the Coalition reports strikes, there is a lack of clarity about the responsibility of individual Coalition member states for the strikes. Amnesty International is concerned that this lack of clarity may enable individual Coalition members to evade responsibility for their actions. The UK Government, for example, maintained until May 2018 that it had not killed a single civilian in Syria or Iraq,

[155] ICRC, Customary IHL Study, Rule 14; Protocol I, Articles 51(5)(b) and 57.
[156] ICRC, Customary IHL Study, Rule 156, pp. 599-601.
[157] Yves Sandoz, Christophe Swinarski, Bruno Zimmermann, Commentary on the Additional Protocols, ICRC, 1987, para. 2,209.
[158] ICRC, Customary IHL Study, Rule 15. See also Protocol II, Article 13(1).
[159] 5 ICRC, Customary IHL Study, Rule 17.
[160] ICRC, Customary IHL Study, Rules 16-19.
[161] ICRC, Customary IHL Study, Rule 20.
[162] ICRC Customary IHL, Rule 21.
[163] "Raqqa: a city destroyed then forgotten", Samuel Oakford, Airwars.org, 12 March 2018, available at https://airwars.org/news/raqqa-a-city-destroyed-then-forgotten/

despite carrying out thousands of air strikes across the two countries.[164] On 2 May 2018 it admitted for the first time that one of its drone strikes had caused one civilian casualty in Syria in March 2018.[165]

The problem attributing responsibility to individual states acting in military coalitions is described in an article by the ICRC, International Committee of the Red Cross, legal advisers: "… (Partnering) might also be a cloak against accountability for such crimes. With the opaque distribution of tasks, the diffusion of responsibility that is inherent to partnering, the international community is less readily able to identify the State, the group, and even less likely, the individual, that is responsible for unlawful conduct. This can create a climate in which stakeholders, political and military alike, perceive themselves to be free from the scrutiny of accountability processes and act beyond the parameters of their usual normative reference frameworks."[166]

International law recognises, however, that a state which "aids or assists another state in the commission of an internationally wrongful" will be internationally responsible for doing so, provided it had knowledge of the circumstance and the act would be internationally wrongful if committed by that state.[167] Furthermore, states will also be responsible for internationally wrongful acts for conduct consisting of an action *or omission* which is both attributable to the state and constitutes a breach of its international obligations (emphasis added).[168] The responsibility of states is engaged by organs of state[169], including their military units or by "persons or entities exercising elements of government authority",[170] including military officers and politicians.

IHL requires all states to "respect and ensure respect" for its provisions under Common Article 1 of the Geneva Conventions. This includes both positive and negative obligations on states providing assistance to another state which is then used to commit a violation of international humanitarian law.[171] The negative obligation is not to encourage, aid or assist in violations of IHL by parties to a conflict.[172] The positive obligation includes the prevention of violations where there is a foreseeable risk they will be committed and prevention of further violations where they have already occurred.[173]

The USA, UK, France, and other states involved in military operations as part of Operation Inherent Resolve therefore may be legally responsible for unlawful acts carried out by Coalition members. The involvement of senior military officers from Britain and France states in the upper echelons of the OIR's command structure further underlines the potential for shared responsibility for internationally wrongful acts. By way of example, the Deputy Commander for Operational Inherent Resolve during the Raqqa operation – Major General Rupert Jones – was British. Military officers representing France and Australia also held senior positions within the Coalition. The orders and decisions of these officers engage the responsibility of their respective states for acts and omissions in relation to any unlawful acts committed by their own aircraft or military forces, or by others they control, direct or assist.

DUTY TO INVESTIGATE, PROSECUTE AND PROVIDE REPARATION

States have an obligation to investigate allegations of war crimes by their forces or nationals, or committed on their territory and, if there is sufficient admissible evidence, prosecute the suspects. They must also investigate other war crimes over which they have jurisdiction, including through universal jurisdiction, and, if appropriate, prosecute the suspects.[174]

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[164] See, for example, "Britain drops 3,400 bombs in Syria and Iraq – and says no civilians killed", Middle East Eye, 26 October 2017, available at http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/exclusive-uk-drops-3400-bombs-syria-and-iraq-and-says-no-civilians-killed-2032942935
[165] See, for example, "Syria war: MoD admits civilian died in RAF strike on Islamic State", BBC, 2 May 2018, available at http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-43977394
[166] "Fighting together: Obligations and opportunities in partnered warfare", Cordula Droege and David Tuck, Humanitarian Law & Policy, 28 March 2017, available at http://blogs.icrc.org/law-and-policy/2017/03/28/fighting-together-obligations-opportunities-partnered-warfare/
[167] Article 16, Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts ("Articles on State Responsibility"), adopted by the International Law Commission in August 2001 and endorsed by the UN General Assembly in a number of Resolutions, and approved *ad referendum*, that is, without prejudice to the question of their future adoption or other appropriate action. See UN General Assembly Resolution 71/133, www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/71/133
[168] *Ibid*, Article 2.
[169] *Ibid*, Article 4.
[170] *Ibid*, Article 5.
[171] ICRC, 2016 Commentary on the First Geneva Convention, para. 154.
[172] ICRC, 2016 Commentary on the First Geneva Convention, para. 158-161.
[173] ICRC, 2016 Commentary on the First Geneva Convention, para. 164.
[174] ICRC Customary IHL Study Rule 158.

States responsible for violations of IHL are required to make full reparation for the loss or injury caused.[175] In addition, the Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law enshrine the duty of states to provide effective remedies, including reparation to victims. This instrument sets Out the appropriate form of reparation, including, in principles 19-23, restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction, and guarantees of non-repetition.[176]

[175] ICRC, Customary IHL, Rule 150.
[176] Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law (Basic Principles on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation), adopted and proclaimed by UN General Assembly Resolution 60/147 of 16 December 2005, UN Doc. A/RES/60/147.

9. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Coalition claims that its precision air campaign allowed it to bomb IS out of Raqqa while causing very few civilian casualties do not stand up to scrutiny. Based on information from Amnesty International's field investigation and public reporting, Coalition air and artillery strikes killed hundreds of civilians and injured many more. The Coalition strikes detailed in this report appear either disproportionate or indiscriminate or both and as such unlawful and potential war crimes. The cases documented here, provide an example of a wider pattern, raise serious concerns and should be thoroughly and independently investigated. Mistakes must be acknowledged, causes analysed and lessons learned.

This report acknowledges that IS tactics created a challenging operational environment for Coalition forces and the SDF. However, such challenges did not justify failing to take all feasible precautions to minimise harm to civilians. States bearing responsibility for violations of international humanitarian law (IHL) have a duty to investigate and provide redress. Where evidence of war crimes exists, states are also obliged to prosecute.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO MEMBER STATES OF THE US-LED COALITION

Amnesty International calls on member states of the US-led Coalition to take the following measures as a matter of urgency:

- Fully comply with the rules of IHL in the planning and execution of air strikes and other attacks, including by cancelling attacks that risk being indiscriminate, disproportionate or otherwise unlawful;
- End the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects, such as artillery and mortars, in the vicinity of populated civilian areas, consistent with the prohibition on indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks;
- Assume the presence of civilians in every structure when engaging IS fighters, given the likelihood of IS using civilians as human shields and adjust tactics to take civilian presence into account;
- Take all feasible precautions to minimise harm to civilians, including giving effective advance warnings of impending attacks to the civilian population in the concerned areas, including, when possible, by providing advice to civilians on possible evacuation routes;
- Ensure that SDF forces comply with IHL, including by refraining from the use of mortars in the vicinity of civilian areas, and refraining from looting civilian property;
- Ensure that concrete plans for evacuation and humanitarian assistance to civilians are put in place and budgeted for sufficiently early in the planning of military operations, so that adequate food, water, shelter and medical care can be promptly provided to civilians displaced by such military operations.

INVESTIGATION AND PUBLIC DISCLOSURE

- Publicly acknowledge the scale and gravity of the loss of civilian lives and destruction of property and livelihoods which resulted from Coalition strikes during the military operation to oust IS from Raqqa;
- Make public information which is necessary to investigate the circumstances of and establishing responsibility for civilian losses during the military operation, notably:
    - Dates, times, exact location, weapons used and intended target of the strikes carried out by Coalition forces
    - Which Coalition members' forces carried out which strike
    - What measures were taken to ascertain how many civilians were present in the vicinity of the target and the precautions taken to minimise harm to civilian and civilian objects;
- Make public the findings of any investigation carried out so far to determine the scale of the human and material civilian loss, that is the number of civilians killed and injured and civilian property and infrastructure destroyed or damaged as a result of Coalition strikes;
- Make public the methodology of any investigation carried out into Coalition strikes, or attributed to Coalition forces, which reportedly killed or injured civilians, notably:
    - Whether any post-strike site visits and interviews with survivors, witnesses, and families of victims were carried out, and if so for which cases;
- Publicly disclose the findings of all investigations into civilian casualties or destruction and damage to civilian objects from Coalition strikes, including whether any attacks were found to violate IHL, whether reparation or compensation of any type was provided to the victims, and whether those suspected of responsibility for violation were held accountable;
- Urgently put in place an independent, impartial mechanism to effectively and promptly investigate credible reports of violations of IHL make the findings of such investigations public;
- Urgently commit to an urgent review of military procedures for assessing civilian casualties aimed at identifying procedural defects and rectifying them. It must make findings public in a timely and transparent manner.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND REPARATION

- Put in place the necessary mechanism to provide prompt and full reparation to victims and families of victims of violations, including compensation, restitution, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition. The mechanism should be transparent, accessible to civilians in Syria, and ensure that reparation of is provided in a non-discriminatory manner;
- Allocate and provide adequate budgetary resources and ensure that all legislative and regulatory measures are in place to provide reparation to victims;
- Where there is admissible evidence that individual members of Coalition forces are responsible for war crimes, ensure they are prosecuted in a fair trial without recourse to the death penalty;
- Put in place a mechanism to ensure that lessons are learned and that strikes in ongoing Coalition military operations in Syria are carried out in full compliance with the rules of IHL.

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND CLEARANCE OF UNEXPLODED ORDNANCE (UXO)

- Ensure that security, shelter and services to those displaced by the conflict in Raqqa is provided until such a time when they can safely and voluntarily return to their homes and support themselves;
- Ensure that these services are of the highest possible quality and they are provided based on needs and in a non-discriminatory manner, and ensure that the displaced are not arbitrarily prevented from returning to Raqqa;
- Ensure that the necessary resources, equipment and expertise are available to complete in the shortest time possible the clearance of (UXO) and IEDs in Raqqa. In the meantime, support the provision of awareness-raising programmes to educate residents about the dangers posed by UXO and IEDs;

- Provide the necessary funding for humanitarian assistance to enable civilians to return to Raqqa and set up a mechanism in consultation with the returning community to ensure that programmes are tailored to fit requirements on the ground and that assistance is provided in a non-discriminatory manner;
- Current donors should immediately review their assistance programmes in Raqqa to ensure that they are meeting the most immediate needs of the returning community. Such a review should be done in consultation with a cross-section of stakeholders in the community, and should ensure the participation of women;
- Ensure that funding plans for humanitarian assistance and UXO clearance in Raqqa are in place to provide the long-term support needed.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE SYRIAN DEMOCRATIC FORCES

Amnesty International calls on the SDF to:

INVESTIGATION AND PUBLIC DISCLOSURE

- Make public information which is necessary to investigate the circumstances of and establishing responsibility for civilian losses during the military operation, notably disclose full details of all co-ordinates provided to Coalition forces for air and artillery strikes including the intended targets for those strikes;
- Ensure that Raqqa residents can register complaints against SDF members with SDF authorities for conduct carried out during and post the Raqqa military operation without fear of reprisals or retaliation;
- Ensure that all allegations lodged against SDF personnel are investigated thoroughly and independently, remove from the ranks all persons who committed or ordered violations of IHL, and ensure those responsible for crimes are held accountable.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE RAQQA CIVIL COUNCIL

International calls on the RCC to:

ACCOUNTABILITY AND REPARATION

- Establish offices in and around Raqqa where residents can register their losses and any complaints about incidents which occurred during and since the military campaign. The offices must be adequately staffed and easily accessible to residents and to those who are still displaced;
- Co-operate with Coalition members to ensure that reparation/compensation is allocated to civilians with appropriate oversight in place in order to protect the integrity of the process.

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“WAR OF ANNIHILATION”

DEVASTATING TOLL ON CIVILIANS, RAQQA – SYRIA

The four-month military operation carried out by the US-led Coalition to oust the armed group calling itself Islamic State (IS) from the Syrian city of Raqqa, killed hundreds of civilians, injured many more and destroyed much of the city. Residents were trapped, as fighting raged in Raqqa’s streets between IS militants and Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) fighters, and US-led Coalition’s air and artillery strikes rocked the city. With escape routes mined by IS and the group’s snipers shooting at those trying to flee, there was nowhere safe for civilians. Entire families were killed in Coalition air strikes in their homes or in the very places where they had sought refuge, or as they tried to flee. Eight months on, the Coalition remains in denial about the human tragedy resulting from its military campaign and the victims have received neither justice nor reparation. Amnesty International is urging Coalition members to promptly and impartially investigate allegations of international law violations and civilian casualties. They must provide reparation to the victims and adequate assistance for the desperately needed demining and reconstruction work.

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