

Propaganda War: Houla Massacre Committed by US-NATO Sponsored “Free Syrian Army”. But They Accuse Syrian Government

By [Thierry Meyssan](#)

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[The] 108 bodies were laid out by the Free ‘Syrian’ Army [1] in a mosque in Houla. According to the rebels, these were the remains of civilians massacred on 25 May 2012 by pro-government militia known as ‘Shabbihas’.

The Syrian government appeared completely shocked by the news. It immediately condemned the killings, which it attributed to the armed opposition.

While the national news agency, SANA, was unable to provide details with certainty, the Syrian Catholic news agency, Vox Clamantis, immediately issued a testimony of some of the events formally accusing the opposition [2].

Five days later, the Russian news channel Rossiya 24 (exVesti) aired a very detailed 45-minute report, which remains to date the most comprehensive public inquiry [3].

The West and Gulf States who are working towards a “*regime change*” in Syria and have already recognized the opposition as a privileged interlocutor, have adopted the FSA’s version of events without waiting for the report from the United Nations Supervision Mission (UNSMIS).

As a sanction, most of them have resorted to a prearranged measure, namely the expulsion of Syrian ambassadors to their respective countries. This does not represent a rupture of diplomatic relations, as the rest of the accredited Syrian diplomatic personnel will remain stationed where they are.

The United Nations Security Council adopted a presidential statement condemning the massacre without indicating who was responsible. It furthermore reminded the Syrian government of its responsibilities, namely the protection of its people using proportionate measures, that’s to say without the use of heavy weapons [4].

Contrary to this, the High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay endorsed the allegations blaming the Syrian authorities, and demanded that the case be transferred to the International Criminal Court.

French President François Hollande and his Foreign Affairs Minister Laurent Fabius have announced their intention to convince Russia and China not to obstruct a future Security Council’s resolution authorizing the use of force, while the French press is accusing Russia

and China of protecting a criminal regime.

Responding to these charges, Russia's First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Andrey Denissov expressed regret over France's "basically emotional reaction" – devoid of analysis. He reiterated that the steadfast position of his country, in this case as for others, is not to support governments, but peoples (it being understood that the Syrian people elected President al-Assad at the last constitutional referendum).

The United Nations Supervision Mission went to Damascus at the request of the Syrian government. It was received by the opposition who control this zone, and was able to establish various observations to be used in writing its status report.

At an internal press briefing, the President of the Syrian investigation Commission into the massacre read a brief statement revealing the initial elements of the current investigation. According to him, the massacre was carried out by the opposition as part of an FSA military operation in the area.

Aware that the findings of the UN Supervision Mission report may backfire on them, the Western countries requested that the Human Rights Council in Geneva (which is under their control) set up another investigation Commission. A report from this body could be produced quickly in order to impose a version of events before the Supervision Mission is able to draw its own conclusions.

How can we know what happened in Houla?



Press agencies and Western foreign ministers immediately blamed the Syrian government for the killings, before any investigation could take place.

Two main factors are impeding the work of investigators. The Syrian government lost control of Houla many weeks ago. Syrian magistrates are therefore unable to go to Houla, and even if some journalists are able to do so, this is only with the permission of and under close surveillance by the FSA.

There is however one exception: a team from *Rossiya 24*, the 24-hour Russian news channel was able to move around the area without an escort, and produce an exceptionally detailed report.

The official Syrian Commission claims to have collected several witness statements, but has declared that these shall only be presented to the press once the final report has been established. At present, the identity of these witnesses remains protected by investigation secrecy. However, several of the accounts were broadcast on public television on 1st June.

The investigators are also in possession of videos provided exclusively by the FSA.

Lastly, since the FSA amassed the bodies in a mosque and began burying them the very next day, it was not possible for UN observers to carry out forensic assessments on many of the dead.

Voltaire Network 's conclusions



Victims of the Houla slaughter.

Houla is not a town, but an administrative area made up of three villages, each with about 25,000 residents but which today lie largely abandoned. The Sunni market town of Tal Daw has been under rebel control for many weeks. The Free “Syrian” Army had imposed its rule there. The national Army was securing transport routes by maintaining several posts on roads within the area, but did not venture beyond these roads.

Certain individuals kidnapped children and attempted unsuccessfully to extort ransoms. [5] In the end, these children were killed a few days before the Houla massacre, but their bodies were brought by the Free “Syrian” Army to be laid out amongst the others.

In the evening of 24 May, the Free “Syrian” Army launched a very large-scale operation to reinforce its control over the region, and to make Tal Daw its new base.

In order to do this, 600-800 combatants from various districts gathered in Rastan and Saan and proceeded to launch simultaneous attacks on the military bases. At the same time, a team was fortifying Tal Daw by installing five anti-tank missile batteries, and purging the town of some of its inhabitants.

The first victims in Tel Daw were a dozen people related to Abd al-Muty Mashlab – a legislator of the recently elected Baas party who was appointed Secretary of the National Assembly; following this, the family of a senior official – Mouawyya al-Sayyed – was killed. Subsequent targets were families of Sunni origin who had converted to Shiite Islam.

Other victims included the family of two journalists for *Top News* and *New Orient News*, press agencies associated with *Voltaire Network*. Many people, including children, were raped before being killed.

With only one of the Army’s bases having fallen, the assailants changed strategy. They transformed a military defeat into a communication operation, attacking the al-Watani hospital and setting fire to it. They took corpses from the hospital morgue and transported them along with those of other victims to the mosque, where the bodies were filmed.



The theory of a single massacre perpetrated by pro-government militia does not stand up to the facts. There were battles which took place between loyalists and rebels, as well as several massacres of pro-government civilians at the hands of the rebels.

Then, a scenario was staged by the Free “Syrian” Army where corpses originating from these various earlier situations were mixed together.

Indeed, the existence of the “*Shabbihas*” is a myth. Whilst there are certainly individuals in favour of the government who are armed and capable of committing acts of revenge, there is no structure or organized group that could be termed as a pro-government militia.

Political and diplomatic implications



Lamia Chakkour, Syrian Ambassador to France.

The expulsion of Syrian ambassadors by Western countries is a measure that was planned

well in advance and therefore well-coordinated. Westerners were waiting for a massacre of this type before carrying out this action. They ignored numerous previous massacres that they knew had been perpetrated by the Free “Syrian” Army, and seized on this one believing that it had been committed by pro-government militia.

The idea of a coordinated expulsion did not emanate from Paris, rather from Washington. Paris in principle gave its agreement, without having examined the legal implications. For in practice, Lamia Chakkour is also the Syrian Ambassador to UNESCO, and cannot therefore (according to the terms of the *accord de siège*) be expelled from French territory. Further to this, even if she were not accredited to UNESCO, her French-Syrian dual nationality means that she cannot be expelled from French territory.

These expulsions were coordinated by Washington to create the illusion of a general movement in order to put pressure on Russia. Indeed, the US is looking to test the new international balance of power, to size up Russia’s reactions and to find out how far they will go.

The choice of the Houla affair, however, has been a tactical error. Washington seized upon the affair without checking the details, thinking that nobody would be able to verify it. This was forgetting that Russia has moved into the country – with over 100,000 Russians currently residing in Syria.

Of course, they did not deploy a high-tech anti-aircraft defense system just to discourage NATO from bombarding Syria; they also set up information bases including troops that are able to move around rebel controlled areas.

In this way, Moscow was able to shed light on the facts within a few days. Their specialists succeeded in identifying the 13 members of the FSA guilty of these killings and gave their names to the Syrian authorities. With this, not only did Moscow not waver, it has hardened its stance.

For Vladimir Putin, the fact that the West wanted to make the Houla massacre into their symbol shows that they are out of touch with the reality on the ground. Having withdrawn the officers in charge of the Free “Syrian” Army, the only information available to the West comes from their drones and satellites observing what is happening. They have become vulnerable to the lies and vaunting of the mercenaries they have deployed on the terrain.

For Moscow, this massacre is just another tragedy like many others that Syrians have been enduring for the last year. But hasty instrumentation on the part of the West shows that they have failed to develop a new collective strategy since the fall of the Islamic district of Baba Amr. In essence, they are but acting on guesswork, which is allowing others to gain the upper-hand.

[Thierry Meyssan](#)

Translated from French by Katy Stone.

[1] *Voltaire Network* has chosen to write FSA with ‘Syrian’ in inverted commas to indicate that this militia is largely composed of foreigners, and that it’s commander is not Syrian.

[2] “Irreversible divisions in Syria,” *VoxClamantis*, 26 May 2012.

[3] *Global Research* translated to English the transcript of extracts from this programme, see "[Opposition Terrorists "Killed Families Loyal to the Government"](#)", *Voltaire Network* 1 June 2012.

[4] "[Syria: What the Security Council Said](#)", by Thierry Meyssan, *Voltaire Network*, 6 June 2012.

[5] This is currently a security problem in the country. Many of the thugs that had been recruited to swell the ranks of the Free "Syrian" Army were demobilized due to lack of funding. Remaining in the possession of arms provided by the West, they are turning to crime – mainly kidnappings for ransom.

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Articles by: [Thierry Meyssan](#)

About the author:

Intellectuel français, président-fondateur du Réseau Voltaire et de la conférence Axis for Peace. Dernier ouvrage en français : *L'Effroyable imposture : Tome 2, Manipulations et désinformations* (éd. JP Bertrand, 2007).

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