

“Spreading False Information”: Eight Problems with Amnesty’s Report on Aleppo, Syria

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[Dissident Voice](#)

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#), [US NATO](#)

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In 1990 Amnesty International made a horrendous mistake in the midst of the media campaign leading up to Gulf War 1. While U.S. military action was being debated and the public was significantly opposed, it was reported that Iraqi troops were stealing incubators from a Kuwaiti hospital and leaving babies to die on the floor. In [dramatic testimony](#) before the Congressional Human Rights Caucus, a Kuwaiti teenage girl claimed she was a hospital volunteer and eye-witness. Congress members were in tears, the event received huge publicity and had significant influence in changing public opinion. The event was a fabrication conceived by a Washington PR firm and the girl was the Kuwaiti Ambassador’s daughter. There might have been more scrutiny and investigation but the story was corroborated by Amnesty International.

More recently, in early 2011, Amnesty International and other human rights groups were influential in spreading false or exaggerated information about conditions in Libya. It paved the way for a “No Fly Zone” which NATO converted into a mandate for “regime change”. The consequence has been a catastrophic loss of security and living standards for the citizens of Libya and an eruption of violence and sectarianism within and beyond the borders.

Currently we see a major media campaign for a “no fly zone” billed as a “safe zone” in opposition controlled northern Syria. In this context, Amnesty has just issued a report: [“Death Everywhere: War Crimes and Human Rights Abuses in Aleppo, Syria”](#). The 62 page report alleges the Syrian government is deliberately targeting civilians in opposition controlled parts of Aleppo, using barrel bombs to kill 3124 civilians versus only 35 fighters in the past 15 months. Amnesty accuses the Syrian government of committing war crimes and possible “crimes against humanity”. They recommend an arms embargo against the Syrian government.

Following are significant problems with the report.

1. Amnesty ignores external interference in Syria.

Article 2 of the United Nations Charter says “*All members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations*”. It is public information that Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, USA, France and Britain are funding, supplying, weaponizing and promoting armed insurgents in Syria. Is this not a “use of force” against Syria? The insurgents, both Syrian and foreign, are being paid

salaries by one or another of the countries seeking overthrow of the Damascus government. Turkey is providing facilities and military support. The USA is providing training, communications equipment and coordination. Saudi Arabia, France and Qatar are providing weapons. Britain is providing training and other supplies. Are these not violations of the U.N. Charter to which all these countries are signators? The Erdogan government in Turkey has openly advocated taking over northern Syria, imposing a “No Fly Zone” and basically enforcing this as a zone controlled by the NATO/Gulf sponsored opposition. This is a clear threat on Syrian territorial integrity. Why does Amnesty ignore this?

2. Amnesty approves the violation of international customary law.

[International customary law](#) does not allow for supplying arms to “vetted” or “approved” insurgents. Yet one of the Amnesty recommendations to the international community is that: “If considering supplying arms to non-state armed groups in Syria, first carry out a rigorous human rights risk assessment and establish a robust monitoring process ...”.

This is an amazing statement, effectively sanctioning the supplying of arms to insurgents who agree to follow “humanitarian” rules of war. The implication is that it’s permissible to kill soldiers, police, government and security people in Syria if you avoid killing civilians. Would it be similarly permissible for Canada and Mexico to train and arm insurgents to come to the U.S. to kill soldiers, police and anyone else defending the security apparatus?

Somehow we can be sure that Amnesty would NOT accept or justify this invasion and violation of international law. So why are they and others justifying this violation against Syria?

When the U.S. created the ‘Contras’ to sow mayhem and bloodshed in Nicaragua in the 1980s, the World Court at the Hague was clear. Their decision was that “*by training, arming, equipping, financing and supplying the ‘Contra’ forces or otherwise encouraging, supporting and aiding military and paramilitary activities in and against Nicaragua*” the United States was “*in breach of its obligation under customary international law not to intervene in the affairs of another State.*”

The situation today with Syria is very comparable. International customary law has not changed. It is just being ignored. Amnesty should be challenging this violation, not approving it.

3. Amnesty relies on witnesses who are biased and possibly paid and coached.

The Amnesty report is based on interviews with “78 current or former residents of Aleppo and 29 professionals working in or on Aleppo “. Amnesty established contact with witnesses through collaboration with the following groups: Syrian Institute for Justice and Accountability, the Violations Documentation Center, the Syrian Network for Human Rights, and the Syria Research and Evaluation Organization.

Each of these collaborating groups is either based in, or receiving funds from, Turkey, USA or one of the other countries heavily involved in seeking overthrow of the Damascus government.

Two-thirds of the displaced persons in Syria live INSIDE Syria. To produce a more accurate and objective report, Amnesty could have obtained testimonies from people who fled Aleppo

and are now living in Homs, Latakia, Damascus or in Aleppo under government control. That would have entailed collaborating with other organizations that are not part of the foreign funded opposition supporting “human rights” groups, but would have given a more balanced picture.

The Amnesty report includes numerous references to testimony or interviews with members of the “Civil Defence”. What they do not say is that “Syrian Civil Defence”, also known as “White Helmets”, are a creation of the US and UK. There may be some useful training but they are [heavily used for propaganda purposes](#).

The recent exposure of the Richard Engel/NBC hoax confirms that the insurgents are keen to manipulate the media. It is quite likely that witnesses provided to Amnesty were ‘vetted’ and/or coached in advance and some of them might have been paid. With no other testimonies, the result is a highly distorted picture of circumstances in Aleppo.

4. Amnesty relies on dubious data from a biased source.

The Amnesty analysis and conclusions rely substantially on data from the [Violations Documentation Center](#) (VDC). This source is highly partisan. For example, they divide fatalities into two overall groups: “Martyrs” and “Regime Fatalities”.

“Martyrs” include ISIS fighters and foreign mercenaries killed by the Syrian Army/Militia or even by the U.S. airstrikes around Kobani. See the VDC screenshot photo 1 showing the ISIS “martyr” killed in Kobani. Photo 2 shows a young girl listed as “regime fatality”.

The data itself looks dubious. For example, we know there was much conflict and loss of life in the Idlib area during the past six weeks. Both Idlib and Jisr al Shughour were captured by the armed opposition. It is very probable that many Syrian soldiers and armed fighters were killed in the conflict. Many civilians fled the urban areas as the armed groups came in. However, the VDC site (photo 3) shows something startling and less than credible for Idlib Governorate from March 1, 2015 through May 1, 2015:

“regime fatalities” (Syrian army, militia and supporting civilians) = 12

“martyrs” (opposition fighters and supporting civilians) = 662.

There is little or no evidence provided regarding most of the alleged victims. Photographs and video evidence is provided for a small minority of the cases.

The spokesman and advocacy director for VDC is Bassam al Ahmad. He is based in Istanbul and closely connected to the United States as shown in his recent participation in a “Leadership Conference” as shown in photograph #4 below.

In short, Amnesty’s report and conclusions are based on dubious data from a biased source closely aligned with foreign powers actively seeking “regime change” in Damascus.

5. Amnesty ignores important background information.

There is considerable evidence that armed groups which invaded Aleppo in summer 2012 quickly fell into disfavor and became unpopular. The unpopularity of the armed opposition was identified by American journalists James Foley and Stephen Sotloff in the Fall of 2012 and Winter 2012-2013. Foley described how rebels invaded Aleppo in the summer of 2012.

His article, written in October, was titled "[Rebels losing support](#) among civilians in Aleppo". A few months later Sotloff described civilian dislike of the rebels in an article titled "Bread lines and [disenchantment with the FSA](#)".

According to the Syrian journalist known as Edward Dark, there was youthful enthusiasm for early protests but it rapidly turned to regret as armed rebels invaded Aleppo, took over neighborhoods and engaged in widespread looting. As Dark says in his article "[How we lost the Syrian revolution](#)"....

Never have I felt as sad as when, shortly after Aleppo was raided by the rebels, I received messages from some of those people I used to work with. One said, "How could we have been so stupid? We were betrayed!" and another said, "Tell your children someday that we once had a beautiful country, but we destroyed it because of our ignorance and hatred".

Edward Dark may be naive regarding the extent of US and foreign involvement in the armed insurrection but his article seems to sincerely express the early dreams and subsequent regrets of idealistic protesters in Aleppo. The Amnesty report completely ignores this important background and context.

6. Amnesty ignores important current information.

Readers of the Amnesty report on Aleppo may assume there have been large numbers of civilians living in the opposition controlled districts. In reality civilians began departing as soon as the armed insurgents invaded neighborhoods years ago. Currently the most common description of an opposition controlled neighborhood is that it's a "ghost town".

Amnesty also fails to disclose the huge number of Syrian soldiers and militia killed by opposition snipers and bombs. Isn't it relevant that, [depending on the source](#), between 75 and 120 thousand Syrian soldiers and local militia defenders have been killed in Syria?

7. Amnesty echoes allegations which are unverified and probably false.

Opponents of the Syrian government allege that the Syrian Army uses chlorine gas weapons in violation of a recent U.N. Security Council resolution. The Amnesty report includes a graphic of a "barrel bomb" with a caption suggesting that chlorine was used in attacks on March 16, 2015. These claims are widespread but dubious. They ignore the following facts:

(a) Syrian military has no reason to use chlorine since it has more effective bomb explosives;

(b) Syrian military has strong motive to NOT use such a weapon since it has been explicitly sanctioned.

(c) The opposition has a strong motive to use such a weapon because they seek to draw foreign intervention; and,

(d) The opposition has the means and the opportunity to use chlorine gas weapons since they have ground projectiles and because the major chlorine gas producing factory in Syria was [seized by Nusra rebels](#) in 2012.

Instead of seriously examining chlorine allegations, the Amnesty report echoes the dubious

charges.

8. Amnesty fails to recognize what keeps the conflict going.

As indicated above, the initial enthusiasm of idealistic protesters soon turned to despair as they came face to face with the reality of abusive and sectarian armed gangs. The general population was unhappy and largely departed with whatever they could take. This leaves the question: Why does the conflict continue? The reason is because there is a continuing supply of money, weapons, foreign fighters and supplies coming through Turkey. Without that, the conflict would have ended long ago. Perhaps there could have been a reconciliation agreement as was done one year ago in Homs. But because Aleppo is relatively close to the porous border with Turkey, and because wealthy external powers have not been willing to give up on plans for “regime change”, the conflict has continued. Generous salaries have continued to flow to foreign and domestic fighters; supplies and armaments have continued to flow. In recent months Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey have [coordinated more closely](#) to escalate the conflict, including collaboration with Jabhat al Nusra (al Queda). Fighters and heavy artillery recently poured across the Turkish border to invade Idlib then Jisr al Shugour. There are also reports of large quantities of ammonium nitrate fertilizer [going across the border](#) from Turkey destined for exploding and killing Syrians not fertilizing the soil.

Conclusion

Amnesty is appropriately concerned with civilian deaths. But what keeps the war going, to the detriment of soldiers and civilians, is external powers continuing to funnel money, supplies, weapons and mercenaries into Syria. It seems the outside powers are willing to destroy Syria rather than give up their plan for regime change in Damascus.

Tragically there is “death everywhere” in Syria. In significant measure, it is the consequence of powerful countries trampling on international law. Amnesty should be exposing this, not ignoring or approving it.

Photos:



“Martyr” (VDC)



"Regime fatality" (VDC)

Province: Idlib Sex: Show All Status: Show All Display: Show All Start Date: 2015-03-01 End Date: 2015-05-11 This Date:

Cause of Death

☐ Explosion ☐ Shelling ☐ Field Execution ☐ Shooting ☐ Kidnapping - Execution ☐ Kidnapping - Torture ☐ Kidnapping - Torture - Execution ☐ Detention - Execution ☐ Detention - Torture ☐ Detention - Torture - Execution ☐ Un-allowed to seek Medical help ☐ Warplane shelling ☐ Other ☐ Chemical and toxic gases

Name: Family Status: Area: Occupation: Notes: Martyrdom location: Age: Rank:

Latest Martyrs (662)						
						Beginning 2 3 4 5 6 End
Name	Status	Sex	Province	Area	Date of death	Cause of Death
Ferdous al-Khateib	Civilian	Child - Female	Idlib	Jisr Shagour: Al-Kinieh Village	2015-05-11	Warplane shelling
Abdullah al-Khateib	Civilian	Child - Male	Idlib	Jisr Shagour: Al-Kinieh Village	2015-05-11	Warplane shelling
Muneir Khateib	Civilian	Child - Male	Idlib	Jisr Shanour: Al-Kinieh	2015-05-11	Warplane shelling

Latest Martyr Idlib

Fatalities (VDC)

Filter by

Province: Idlib Sex: Show All Status: Show All Display: Show All Start Date: '015-03-01 End Date: '015-05-11 This Date:

Name: Family Status: Area: Notes: Martyrdom location: Age: Rank:

Latest Regime Fatalities (12)						
						Beginning
Name	Rank	Sex	Province	Area	Date of death	Cause of Death
Mouahmmed Ja'afar	Civilian	Child - Male	Idlib	Idlib City	2015-03-23	Shelling
Nour Qabesho	Civilian	Adult - Female	Idlib	Idlib City	2015-03-23	Shelling
Nofous Zakour	Civilian	Adult - Female	Idlib	Idlib City	2015-03-23	Shelling
Mouahmmed Reda Azezi	Civilian	Adult - Male	Idlib	Idlib City	2015-03-23	Shelling
Safwan Azezi	Civilian	Adult - Male	Idlib	Idlib City	2015-03-23	Shelling
Kalah Amam	Civilian	Adult - Male	Idlib	Idlib City	2015-03-23	Shelling

Latest Regime

Idlib Fatalities (VDC)



Bassam al Ahmad of VDC at U.S. Leadership Conference (VDC)



Map Aleppo / Turkey

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