

War of Annihilation: Amnesty's Investigation into the Siege of Raqqa: US, UK and France Committed War Crimes

By [Dr. Leon Tressell](#) and [Rosa Tressell](#)

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"If you stayed you died and if you tried to escape you died ... [I escaped by] walking over the blood of those who were blown up as they tried to flee ahead of us". Munira Hashish, air strike and mines survivor – Source: Amnesty International Report

"We are the good guys and the innocent people on the battlefield know the difference." James Mattis, US Defence Secretary – Source: Amnesty International Report

During 2017 the Isis Caliphate was finally overthrown in Syria and Iraq. Its capital in Raqqa, Syria was captured by Kurdish led SDF forces strongly supported by massive air and artillery strikes provided by America and its French/British allies. During the siege of Raqqa (July-October 2017), while SDF troops slowly captured district after district from Isis forces, the international community ignored warnings from Amnesty International and other human rights groups about the large number of civilian casualties being caused by the massive and indiscriminate air and artillery strikes by Coalition forces.

It was only after the city was fully recaptured by SDF troops in mid October 2017 that the full horror of the American led war of annihilation came to light. This article will draw very heavily from the research provided by Amnesty investigators who went to Raqqa and interviewed hundreds of survivors. Their investigation has produced a very harrowing report entitled – "[War of Annihilation – Devastating Toll On Civilians, Raqqa – Syria](#)"

The war of annihilation waged by America and its allies is best described by the civilians who survived this horrific war crime. The amount of bombs and artillery shells fired into Raqqa by the U.S. led coalition is highly reminiscent of the extermination campaigns waged by American imperialism during its war in Vietnam.

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The SDF campaign to capture the city began in June 2017. The experiences of the Badran family illustrate the living hell that civilians in Raqqa had to endure while the American led coalition pulverised the city with heavy artillery and air strikes.

On 18 July the Badran family made their first escape attempt from the city. They used two cars to make their way out of the living hell that was Raqqa. One of the cars was hit by an

American air strike killing four family members. A surviving family member told Amnesty:

“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”.

Those killed trying to escape in one of the cars were:

- “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)”.

Five members still waiting for the cars to come back and pick them up were then killed by another air strike that completely obliterated the house. One of the female family members told Amnesty investigators:

“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”.

Those killed in the American air strike on the Badran family home were:

- “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 unidentified man”

The surviving members of the Badran family returned to their neighbourhood and stayed with a neighbour while several members received treatment from a hospital nearby. By mid August they were forced to flee to the Harat Al-Sakhani neighbourhood in the Old City in search of a doctor. The Badran family hooked up with several other families with a view to escaping Raqqa. On 18 August they started their escape but didn’t get far as they encountered several Isis members who fired upon their group of 65 killing two people. The group was forced to return to Harat Al-Sakhani.

Retreating back to the Old City further tragedy struck. Rasha, a member of the Badran family describes what happened next:

“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?”

Badran family members killed in the main house at Harat al-Sakhani by American and British air strikes were:

“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:
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-Shehada) Sadeeqa’s 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)''.

Only Rasha, her husband and two other family members survived the Coalition air strike. They were forced to try and find shelter elsewhere. Her two cousins went to find shelter with a neighbour only to be killed by a drone strike upon the house. The 3 floored building was destroyed yet Rasha and her husband were able to hide in the basement for 3 days until they were discovered by an Isis patrol.

They were driven towards the stadium and Harat al-Badu by the Isis patrol to be used as human shields against Coalition air strikes. On 17 September, Rasha her husband and 22 others used the cover of morning prayers to mask the noise of their steps to escape by crossing the SDF front lines. After weeks of hiding and terror, never knowing from one moment to the next if they were going to be killed by a coalition air or artillery strike, Pasha and her husband had reached safety. They had lost their baby Tulip and 38 members of their family.

The story of the Badran family was all too common during the SDF conquest of Raqqa that began in early June 2017 and was supported by an unprecedentedly heavy bombardment by American, British and French forces.

On 14 October the Coalition issued a statement about the SDF truce with ISIS:

“We do not condone any arrangement that allows Daesh terrorists to escape Raqqah without facing justice, only to resurface somewhere else...”.

Yet on 15 October 2017 the remaining Isis forces in Raqqa, numbering several hundred, were allowed by the SDF and their American sponsors to leave the city in safety with large quantities of weapons and with complete impunity for their many crimes. Local residents have told Amnesty investigators that Isis fighters were allowed to evacuate before civilians. Jaira, a mother of two trapped in Harat Al-Badu told Amnesty:

“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.”

The so called International Coalition that helped the SDF destroy Raqqa and kill thousands of civilians was largely an American affair supported by France and the UK. The U.S. had over 2,000 troops supporting the SDF siege of Raqqa while the UK and France had small numbers of special forces close to the front lines.

The American contingent comprised: the Army High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems firing very powerful 237 mm rockets and hundreds of marines who provided artillery support with M777 howitzers firing 155 mm shells into Raqqa. The American artillery fired tens of thousands of rockets and shells into Raqqa. Meanwhile, the US, and its French and British allies pounded Raqqa with over 4,000 air strikes.

Incredibly, over 100,000 people have returned to the ruins of Raqqa despite the large number of unexploded bombs/IED's and the stench of dead bodies buried below the rubble. Since its recapture the surviving residents of Raqqa have faced the prospect of trying to rebuild their shattered lives with very little aid from those who were responsible for the city's destruction. Unexploded American bombs and Isis IED's litter the city with no prospect in sight of any help with this grave threat to residents lives. Everyday people are killed and injured as they try to clear up the rubble of their destroyed homes, bury dead bodies and go about their daily business.

Matters have been compounded by widespread looting throughout the city. Residents have complained to Amnesty that SDF soldiers have been complicit in many acts of looting while providing no security on the streets at night time allowing criminal elements to steal with impunity.

In April of this year the United Nations refugee agency entered Raqqa with much needed relief aid. They were horrified by what they found, "the UN team entering Raqqa city were shocked by the level of destruction, which exceeded anything they had ever seen before".

After destroying Raqqa , America and its allies in the coalition of the killing refuse to acknowledge any responsibility for helping rebuild the city or to provide any kind of humanitarian assistance. In April Jerry Guilbert from the U.S. State Department responded to a journalists question by declaring rather smugly:

"... 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".

The Raqqa Civil Council (RCC) that has been set up by the Kurdish led SDF to govern Raqqa has acknowledged that America and its allies have provided no assistance to the destroyed city. Laila Mustafa of the RCC told Amnesty:

"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".

It has often been said that history is written by the victors and this was never more true than in the Coalition war of annihilation waged in Raqqa against Isis. On 17 September U.S. commander Lieutenant General Stephen Townsend proudly declared:

" ... there has never been a more precise air campaign in the history of armed conflict".

Meanwhile, other partners to these stupendous war crime have denied all culpability for the consequences of their disproportionate and indiscriminate actions in Raqqa. On 8 January 2018 the UK government blithely stated:

"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”.

The 70 page report produced by Amnesty into the destruction of Raqqa by America and its allies makes it very clear that their claim to have carried out precision strikes that caused very few civilian casualties is a down right pack of lies. The coalition of the killing carried out massively disproportionate and indiscriminate air and artillery strikes whose objective was nothing less than the total destruction of a city that had hundreds of thousands of civilian residents.

The people of Raqqa have undergone a shattering experience and suffered such terrible trauma. There is no recognition of this by the western media or the politicians who carry on with their everyday business oblivious to the crimes against humanity committed under the cover of the “War On Terror”.

The deafening silence of the political classes over the annihilation of Raqqa stands in sharp contrast to the hysteria that accompanied the liberation of Aleppo by the Syrian and Russian forces in early 2017. Media headlines incessantly screamed that Russia and Assad’s forces were using barrel bombs and indiscriminate air attacks to destroy the city and defeat the so-called “moderate terrorists”. More recently, we have seen the hypocritical outrage over the alleged use of chemical weapons by Syrian forces while the American use of white phosphorous in Raqqa is completely ignored.

The destruction of Raqqa and the war of annihilation waged by America and its blood stained allies will stand in the halls of infamy as a terrible crime whose immorality would make the devil himself proud of this achievement.

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