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US-led Strikes Kill 100 Syrian Civilians as Amnesty Reports Potential War Crimes in Raqqa

US and coalition warplanes over the past several weeks have been pounding areas of Syria's Deir Ezzor and al-Hasaka provinces still controlled by Islamic State militants, reportedly killing around 100 civilians, including more than 30 children, in the process. This, as the human rights group Amnesty International released a scathing report on Tuesday accusing the United States of possible war crimes during the battle to capture the de facto IS capital of Raqqa last year.

The deadliest recent air strike killed at least 24 civilians, including as many as 14 children, while they slept in their homes in the village of al-Qasr on May 1. Local and international media reported the victims, who included children as young as five months old, were from two families. Both the US-led coalition and Iraq have been blamed for the killings; both reported conducting air strikes in the area that day.

The town of Baghouz in Deir Ezzor was repeatedly bombed throughout May and June, with the UK-based monitor group Airwars and local media reporting 12 civilians killed in a May 10 US-led attack, another nine residents, including three children, killed in a May 31 strike and three more people killed on June 4, according to the UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR).

Hadaj, in al-Hasaka province, reportedly lost 22 residents in three US-led coalition bombings in recent weeks. Airwars and local media reported five women and four children died in a May 12 strike, while Al Jazeera and other media and monitor groups said at least eight members of a single family, including four children, died in a May 31

US-led strike. SOHR [reported](#) a man and his wife were killed by coalition bombing on June 2, with Euphrates Post reporting that two of the couple's children also died in the strike.

Airwars and other monitor and media sources reported 10 civilians killed in five separate bombing raids on al-Soussa, in Deir Ezzor, between May 16 and June 3.

In al-Hasaka province, monitor groups and local media [reported](#) eight civilians including a pregnant woman and three children reportedly died when warplanes belonging to either the US-led coalition or Iraq bombed their house in al-Hammadi village on May 11. As many as 14 civilians, five of them children, died in what local media reports [claimed](#) were attacks with internationally banned cluster bombs on al-Jazza village on June 4.

These latest reports of civilian air strike casualties come as Amnesty International [released a report](#) titled “‘War of Annihilation’: Devastating Toll on Civilians, Raqqa — Syria” detailing what the human rights group calls “potential war crimes,” including “disproportionate and indiscriminate attacks” committed by US-led forces that “killed and injured thousands of civilians” during the 2017 battle to capture Raqqa from IS militants. The report's title is a reference to an [announcement](#) last May by Defense Secretary James “Mad Dog” Mattis that the US was escalating from a war of “attrition” to one of “annihilation.” Mattis brushed off concerns about innocent Syrians trapped between coalition bombs and IS snipers and landmines, stating that in such a fight, “civilian casualties are a fact of life.”

Mattis' declaration was in line with earlier campaign promises by Donald Trump to [“bomb the shit out of”](#) IS fighters and “take out their families,” a war crime. After taking office, President Trump [loosened](#) rules of engagement meant to protect civilian life, with disastrous results in not only Syria and Iraq but also in [Afghanistan](#), [Somalia](#) and [Yemen](#).

On June 6, 2017, just a week after Mattis' announcement, US and allied local and international forces launched the fifth and final phase of the campaign to drive IS from Raqqa. As usual, US officials [said](#) they were fighting “the most precise air campaign in history,” a claim repeated verbatim during the concurrent destruction of Mosul, Iraq, where [more than 9,000](#) civilians died as US and coalition forces bombed and shelled their way to victory. However, the reality on the ground told a completely different story.

“The coalition's 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,” the new Amnesty

report states. “On the ground in Raqqa we witnessed a level of destruction comparable to anything we’ve seen in decades of covering the impact of wars.” It continued:

“What leveled the city and killed and injured so many civilians was the US-led coalition’s repeated use of explosive weapons in populated areas where they knew civilians were trapped. Even precision weapons are only as precise as their choice of targets.”

The report looks at four Raqqa families that lost 90 members, including 39 from one family, to US-led air strikes and artillery attacks. The Pentagon said some 30,000 artillery rounds, which can have a margin of error of over 100 meters (330 feet), were fired during the battle. In densely populated urban areas, the results were devastating.

“Those who stayed died and those who tried to run away died... we were trapped,” recalled air strike survivor Munira Hashish, who finally managed to escape with her children by carefully walking over the blood of people who were blown up by IS mines as they fled ahead of her.

One of the most scathing parts of the new report blasts US, Syrian Democratic Forces and other allied fighters for wiping out entire families during the final hours of the battle, shortly before granting IS fighters safe passage out of the city.

According to the local monitor group Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently, the final coalition assault on Raqqa left [1,873 civilians dead](#) and thousands more wounded. The group said some 450,000 residents were displaced as coalition forces destroyed around 90 percent of the city, including thousands of homes, eight hospitals, more than 40 schools and nearly 30 mosques. United Nations war crimes investigators last June [condemned](#) the “staggering” loss of innocent life caused by “excessive” US air strikes.

Airwars [estimates](#) a minimum of 6,321 Syrian and Iraqi civilians are likely to have been killed by US and coalition bombing and shelling since the anti-IS campaign began in September 2014. Estimates of the number of civilians killed during the more than 16 years of the US-led war against terrorism range from the low hundreds of thousands to [over 1.3 million](#).

Since the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan in August 1945, the US military has killed more innocent civilians than any other armed force in the world, by far.