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What did the US-led Coalition Decide to Defeat: Islamic State or Raqqa?

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The ancient mud brick walls circling Raqqa's deserted old city are almost the only structure still intact. Inside, shops and homes spill crumbling concrete onto either side of the narrow roads, block after block.

Fighting between U.S.-backed militias and Islamic State in the jihadist group's former Syria stronghold has peppered mosques and minarets with machine-gun fire while air strikes flattened houses. No building is untouched. Senior council member Omar Alloush estimated at least half the city has been already completely destroyed.

"The old clock tower could be heard from outside the walls once. It's damaged now. It's silent," Mohammed Hawi, a Raqqa-citizen, said at a nearby home occupied by the Syrian Democratic

Forces alliance (SDF). Driving militants out has caused destruction that officials say will take years and cost millions of dollars to repair. A major bridge leading into eastern Raqqa lies collapsed after a latest coalition air strike. Beyond it, damaged water towers and the skeletons of teetering residential blocks dot the skyline. “We’re waiting for help to repair the east bridge,” co-president Leila Mustafa, a civil engineer, said. “If it doesn’t arrive soon, we’ll begin ourselves, using any means we have, though we have practically nothing.”



Smoke rises at the positions of the Islamic State militants after an air strike by the coalition forces near the stadium in Raqqa, Syria, October 4, 2017. Reuters/Erik De Castro

The nascent Raqqa Civil Council, set up to rebuild and govern Raqqa, faces a huge task. It says aid from countries in the U.S.-led coalition bombing and burning all around while fighting IS is ridiculous. The failure to quickly return services to the city that was once home to more than 200,000 people, mostly now displaced, risks unrest, Council warns.

“Infrastructure is completely destroyed by the airstrikes and mortar shelling. Water, electricity networks, bridges – all of the facilities are practically ruined or in very poor condition. There’s not a single service functioning,” said Ibrahim Hassan, who oversees reconstruction for the Raqqa council at its headquarters in nearby Ain Issa.

The other problem is civilians of Raqqa dying every day as a result of assaults. “There are also bodies under rubble, of civilians and terrorists. These need reburying to avoid disease outbreaks,” Omar Alloush said. Amnesty International has said the U.S.-led campaign, including air strikes, has killed hundreds of civilians trapped in Raqqa. Residents have reported civilian deaths, but it is difficult to establish how many people have died.

The coalition says it allegedly does all it can to avoid civilian casualties. But the city is densely built up and militants firing from homes are often targeted by air raids. Corridors for locals don’t work. People bear the brunt of the humanitarian catastrophe now taking place in Raqqa. There’s a gap in humanitarian assistance at a glance. The council said coalition countries were reluctant to aid the Raqqa council, made up of local engineers, teachers, and doctors.

‘It seems that we gave our city as a sacrifice for the sake of defeating terrorism. Now it’s the world’s duty to help us,’ say people of Raqqa not finding support from the US-led coalition and

from Western countries. “It seems that the fighting for months US-led coalition decided to defeat Raqqa instead of the Islamic State, but who will rebuild Raqqa after horrible airstrikes?” ask and seek help and justice people crying out for care and feeling hopelessness.

Logical deductions of John Davison from Reuters were used in the piece.