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Syrian Rebel War Crimes Fueling Faction Split

By Jason Ditz

September 16, 2013

Discussions of the war crimes committed by the many assorted factions in Syria's ongoing civil war inevitably lead to ugly arguments about which of the many war criminals is worst. The issue is also underscoring the divide between rebel factions.

While almost no one in the civil war is blameless, UN investigators say that the foreign Islamist fighters that have flocked to al-Qaeda's banner are "committing the worst crimes," and that the Free Syrian Army (FSA), a secular faction, is at least trying to have its fighters follow international law.

The investigators expressed concern that the stark differences in strategy among the factions would make it hard to get the rebels together for the planned Geneva 2 peace conference, though none of the factions have even agreed to participate, so that's in many ways academic.

Instead of rebel unity, the more immediate prospect is more war-within-a-war situations erupting, with the FSA and al-Qaeda seemingly headed into open conflict, and al-Qaeda already fighting Kurdish factions.