

# War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity in Syria

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**ABSTRACT** *This article evaluates the civil war in Syria from a human rights perspective from March 2011 until this article went to press. I tried to evaluate the gross human rights violations, war crimes, and crimes against humanity that were committed by different groups in Syria, including the regime, the rebels, DAISH, and others.*

## Human Rights in Syria before the Civil War

**T**here were a series of coups and interminable power struggles that went on for a decade in the Syrian Arab Republic, after it was re-established in 1961. This period ended with the victory of Hafez al-Assad, a member of the Baath Party's military wing, in 1970. Although on paper, the Syrian state was considered a "republic," all key governmental positions, including the Presidency, have been controlled by the members of the Assad family and the Alawites.<sup>1</sup>

The situation of human rights in Syria was dismal during the Hafez al-As-

sad period. Ironically, the Syrian government ratified many human rights conventions during Assad's time in power. Syria's government ratified the "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights" (1969), the "International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination" (1969), the "International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (1969)" and the "International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women" (2003).<sup>2</sup> Syria also acceded to the Geneva Convention dated in 1949. At the same time, over the last 40 years, Syria remained one of the most repressive countries of the world.<sup>3</sup> The state of emergency,

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which was in effect between 1963 and 2011, granted the government sweeping powers of arbitrary detention and arrest. The government strictly restricted the freedom of movement, expression, and organization. The single party regime under the hegemony of the Baath Party and Assad's Family carried out gross human rights abuses.

Until the civil war of 2011, the gravest human rights violations took place in the Hafez al-Assad period in the 1980s. Hundreds were killed during the operations in Jisr al-Shughur (Cisruş-Şuğûr), Sarmadah and Kinsafrah in 1980. Following an assassination attempt against of Hafez al-Assad in Damascus, a thousand prisoners were killed in the Tadmor Prison, about 200 kilometers north-east of Damascus, on June 26, 1980. The biggest massacre of Hafez al-Assad's period took place in 1982 in the city of Hama. In response to the uprising in the city of Hama, the army laid siege to the city and exposed it to air and artillery bombardments without any distinction between civilians or dissidents. As a result, between 10,000 and 25,000 people were

killed. The international community did not learn about the Hama massacre for a long time.<sup>4</sup> The perpetrators of these gross violations were never brought to justice. The regime's policy of oppression prevented the formation of democracy and any tangible opposition. Many Syrian citizens, who were opponents of the regime, were forced to live in exile. As there was no accountability for these previous egregious abuses, human rights violations today continue to be easily carried out by Bashar al-Assad and the current Syrian regime. Many human rights organizations continue to collect data, evidence, and document the ongoing violations for the purpose of laying bear the truth of what is occurring and attempting to enforce accountability. In the long run, it will be through the promotion of justice and accountability in Syria that peace will be restored.

In 2000, when Bashar al-Assad came to power, after the death of his father, many hoped that the decades of oppression would end. At the very beginning there was a glimmer of hope, as, Bashar al-Assad promised political and economic freedom. However, the period that was known as the "Damascus Spring" did not last long. In 2010, the Human Rights Report of the US State Department described Syria as an authoritarian regime and noted that security forces committed extrajudicial killings. Further, there were reports of enforced disappearances and systematic tortures in detention centers and prisons carried out in all impunity by security officers. There were never any formal in-

vestigations into these violations. The report also stated that the judiciary in Syria was not independent; violence and societal discrimination against women, and discrimination against minorities, particularly Kurds<sup>5</sup>, and severe restriction of workers' rights continued.<sup>6</sup>

It has been claimed that sectarian differences were not an issue in Syria before the Arab Spring, and it was only after March 2011 that an artificial sectarian conflict was created. This claim, however, is erroneous from a historical perspective. The Assad family was part of a movement that came to power on the tide of Arab secular-nationalism in the 1960s and 70s. Hafez al-Assad brought Arab nationalism to the fore rather than promote the Alawite religion while in power. Along with the Alawite minority, certain Sunni families were also appointed to upper positions in bureaucracy or in the military. Still, the Alawite-minority has continued to fill about 90 percent of the management positions in the army and security units.<sup>7</sup> For the Assad regime, religion and ethnic identity was not important for the government unless the legitimacy of the regime was questioned. In fact, the Syrian government tended to "ignore" internal social conflicts and the ethnic pluralism that existed in the country. So, religious tolerance and ethnic plurality were not conceptually recognized and were never seriously addressed until this artificial balance broke after the last uprising.

The Arab Spring that arose in Tunisia in December 2010 reached Syria in

March 2011. Bashar al-Assad's reaction to the anti-government protests was a brutal repression. This method might have been effective under Hafez al-Assad's since information flow was not open when he was in power. However, the age of the Internet and social media and new information-communication tools on mobile phones with the cumulative effect of the Arab Spring gave courage to the Syrian nation to stand up against its autocratic rule.

The regime forces used police, military, intelligence units and Shabbiha militia to suppress the protests. This method fostered the expansion of protests across the country. The peaceful protests in Syria first transformed into an uprising when the regime responded with violence and then into an armed struggle of certain opposition groups aiming to overthrow the regime. Today, what is left of Syria has become the scene of an on-going civil war, as a number of opposition groups, Kurds and ISIL have taken control of different regions and cities nationwide. The civilians are suffering unthinkable atrocities. Deliberate attacks on civilians and civilian objects, the indiscriminate use of explosive weapons, arbitrary arrests, torture and other ill-treatment, and enforced disappearances have become routine.<sup>8</sup>

## Road to Civil War

As Syria entered into its fifth year of civil war in March 2015, more than 220,000 people have been killed, hundreds of thousands people have been





Syrian men walk amidst the rubble and debris in the Qadi Askar district of the northern Syrian city of Aleppo on July 5, 2015.

AFP PHOTO / AMC / ZEIN AL-RIFAI

injured, almost half of the population had to migrate from their homes, and more than four million Syrian fled to neighboring countries. Massive human rights violations, crimes against humanity, and war crimes have been committed during the civil war, as Syria became the theater for one of the greatest humanitarian dramas of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Today, the international community and media remains focused on DAISH's (ISIL/ISIS) killings and violations because of its brutality and cruelty. However, the regime's atrocities are also shocking. This is not to belittle DAISH's barbarity, but it is still important to remember the gross human rights violations carried out by Bashar al-Assad's regime since the outbreak of the civil war. The approach taken by the Regime is that of extremely violent repression. For

example, after 15 children painted anti-government graffiti on the walls in the city of Dara'a in March 2011, they were tortured while being detained by the regime's security forces. Instead of launching a thorough investigation against the security forces to appease the crowds protesting this crime, the government unleashed further repression. This reaction caused a renewal of protests. To stop the turmoil, Bashar al-Assad issued a general amnesty for political prisoners, once on March, 7 2011 and then another, on May 31, 2011. Then he ended the State of Emergency Law, in effect since 1963, on April 19, 2011; annulled the State High Council of Security and approved a new law allowing peaceful demonstrations. However, these small steps could no longer prevent the protests from transforming into skirmishes and the skirmishes into a civil war in Syria.<sup>9</sup>

The protests were initially held only in the south of the country, but then they branched out to the north, close

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to the Turkish border. The UN Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, in a June 9, 2011 statement<sup>10</sup> said, "...heavy weapons were used against peaceful protests country-wide." About two months later, on August 2, 2011, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) called upon the UN Security Council members and affirmed that the crimes in Syria may amount to crimes against humanity.<sup>11</sup> Upon these calls, the Council agreed on a non-binding statement of condemnation instead of a draft resolution envisaging sanctions and condemning the operations of the Syrian Government against civilians on August 3, 2011.

While the international community was discussing the issue of intervention in the early months of the protests, violations from governmental forces intensified. In this period, various government units commit-

ted grave human rights violations, starting with extrajudicial killings and torture. The crimes in Syria were not only systematic, but also implemented as part of a state policy. The Army, Police units, the *Shabbiha*<sup>12</sup> militia, the *Mukhabarat* (Syria's Intelligence) were responsible for these crimes.<sup>13</sup> In the following months, the regime began to use heavy artillery, air strikes, and shelling to besiege or bomb civic infrastructures. The security forces routinely prevented the wounded from getting medical assistance and imposed a siege on several towns, depriving the population of basic services. The use of these lethal means resulted in thousands of civilian deaths.

## Deaths

Because of the difficulties to cross-check the sources of death statistics, only a few Syrian NGOs continue to count deaths in Syria. As of January 2014, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights announced that the UN has stopped updating the death toll from Syria's civil war.<sup>14</sup> The Syrian government has not published the statistics of deaths. Moreover, at this point, there is no evidence that the Syrian regime is counting the death toll.

Any data on the actual death toll during the civil is constantly rejected by both the regime and opposition groups, each claiming that they were "distorted" and "wrong". The UN and international human rights organizations currently provide numbers of

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estimated killings. According to the Report of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, which was published on August 2014, the number of people who were killed in Syria is 191,369.<sup>15</sup> In addition, there are Syrian NGOs, such as the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (the SOHR), the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), the Syrian Center for Statistics and Research and the Violations Documentation Centre that have their own databases. While SOHR and SNHR document all the killings in Syria that were committed by the regime, opposition groups, extremists, DAISH etc., the others document mainly the deaths of civilians and armed opposition groups that they qualify as “martyrs.” The Syrian NGOs use the local media, the statements of opposition groups, the staff of humanitarian organizations, the records of hospitals, the reports of human rights groups as well as other sources as the basis of the death records. The U.K. based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, has documented deaths of nearly 320.000 Syrians since March 18, 2011.<sup>16</sup> When we look at the all these sources, one could estimate that at least more than 1 per cent of the Syrian population has so far been killed during the civil war.

The Monthly Report of SNHR shows that 2,223 individuals were killed in May 2015 in Syria. According to the Report, 1,713 victims were killed by government forces, including 236 children (averaging eight children a day), 186 women, 305 victims were killed by extremists groups, and 14 victims were killed by People's Protection Units (YPG - *Yekîneyên Parastina Gel*). Coalition forces are also responsible for the deaths of 3 people. Based on these statistics, the regime is responsible for about 77 per cent of the deaths in the Syrian civil war.<sup>17</sup> SOHR documented 21,173 airstrikes carried out by the regime air force on several villages, towns, and cities in Syria over the past eight months; since October 20, 2014, until June 20, 2015<sup>18</sup>. SNHR's monthly report shows that 119 vital facilities were targeted, no less than 674 arbitrary arrests took place, no less than 45 massacres were committed during May 2015, and 84 victims tortured to death.<sup>19</sup>

Although the regime is responsible for the vast majority of the deaths, DAISH comes across as the biggest killer in Syria because it publishes and “glamorizes” its brutal executions and attacks on social media. However, the Assad regime kills Syrians by air attacks and shelling of civilian areas, blocking humanitarian aid to the opposition-controlled areas or killing the citizens of Syria in detention centers and prisons as a result of torture. In contrast to DAISH's highly publicized approach, the Assad regime tries to hide its brutal executions and denies its war crimes, such as using of cluster bomb or barrel bombs.



The difference between the regime and DAISH is the methods used for killing and how they publicize these brutal acts. But for the Syrian people, tragedy is everywhere.

## War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity

During the Syrian civil war, the Assad regime, DAISH and certain rebel groups have not only committed violations and crimes against humanity, but also the number of war crimes of all sides increased hugely. Human rights organizations in Syria, the UN, and international human rights organizations, all observed grave human rights violations and prepared reports on such abuses. As the number of cases increased extraordinarily, the organizations shared general observations and overall figures regarding the violations instead of focusing on individual cases.

## The Regime

Many reports published on the Syrian civil war demonstrated that the Regime is carrying out systematic torture and abuse; in detention center locations and appalling stories of torture are included in these reports. Human rights organizations and the UN have exposed the types of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and gross human rights violations the Syrian regime is conducting against its own population. These atrocities include extra-judicial killings, the increasingly systematic use of violence

by governmental forces, mass arrests, torture, rape, forcible displacement, abductions, forced disappearances, pillaging and destruction of property, degrading or inhumane treatment. Rights are also targeted with the repression of free assembly and violations of freedom of information, notably targeting media and human rights defenders. Further, military operations and besieged cities are often in the guise of practices amounting to collective punishments committed against the civilian population with the added brutality of restricting and denying access to hospitals for those who are injured.<sup>20</sup>

Harsh prison conditions are also a method of torture. The sharp increase in the number of arrests has contributed to the deterioration of detention conditions. Human rights organizations say that common complaints were dirty and insanitary conditions, insufficient room to move or lie down to sleep, lack of bedding, severely restricted access to toilets, inadequate light, and meager food of extremely poor quality.<sup>21</sup> There are special torture methods in the secret detention centers, such as prolonged beatings, often with objects (such as batons and wires), holding the detainees in painful stress positions for prolonged periods of time, often with the use of specially devised equipment, the use of electricity, burning with car battery acid, sexual assault and humiliation, the pulling of fingernails, and mock execution.<sup>22</sup> A report of Amnesty International that was published in 2012 revealed systematic and widespread torture and ill-treatment in Syria, in-

Special envoy of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, US actress Angelina Jolie attends a press conference in Mardin, Turkey, on June 20, 2015.

AFP PHOTO / STRINGER



cluding 31 torture and ill-treatment methods applied by the security forces, pro-army and pro-government groups, and the Shabbiha militia. Moreover, a UN report stressed that systematic torture exists in all detention centers and prisons in Syria and the government authorities are responsible for these crimes.<sup>23</sup>

Raping women and girls during the civil war in Syria is among the mass violations practiced. Due to the danger of rape, thousands of women and girls fled to neighboring countries. The rape victims in Syria are most of the time reluctant to report sexual violence or seek treatment because of the stigma and strong social norms that treat rape as a dishonor to the family.<sup>24</sup>

The Syrian government forces launch general attacks in residential areas to

harm civilians rather than organizing attacks against opponent military bases. Another trend is that fighter jets hit gathering places such as mosques, schools, hospitals, bakeries, and gas stations. The government forces also bomb the health-care facilities and hospitals. Medical staff providing medical aid to opponents in hospitals have been detained, arrested, tortured or killed.<sup>25</sup> Syrian air force has also used cluster munitions in this civil war. The use of cluster munitions is a “war crime” and prohibited. In 2013, there were 119 locations across Syria where at least 156 cluster munitions have been used. Also, unguided missiles and thermo baric bombs<sup>26</sup> are used by the Syrian Army.

In the last two years, the regime began targeting civilians by attacking



with barrel bombs. According to the last report of Amnesty International, the government forces launched continual attacks using barrel bombs and other imprecise explosive weapons on civilian populated areas from January 2014 to March 2015. At least 14 public markets, 12 transportation hubs, 23 mosques, and 17 hospitals or medical centers were bombed. From 2012 until February 2015, about 12,000 people were killed as a result of barrel bomb attacks by government forces. Only 473 of these people were fighters, meaning that 96% of the total casualties were civilians. It is evident in the reports that both sides have been violating international law but the government forces have been responsible for the largest portion of violations and crimes.<sup>27</sup>

The most striking evidence of war crimes came in January 2014. A military police, an MP code-named “Caesar,” who was assigned by the regime as a photographer to take the photographs of the killed detainees brought to military hospitals, submitted a total of 55,000 photos of 11,000 dead bodies to the opposition. A committee of three former chief prosecutors at the criminal tribunals confirmed the authenticity of the photos and approved that the source was reliable. The persons in these photos were subjected to systematic torture. They were tortured while their hands and feet were tied while being bound to rod-like objects. Further, certain men depicted in the photos were the victims of ligature strangulation. The committee noted that the bodies showed the signs of starvation, showing that star-

vation was often used as a method of systematic torture and execution. The committee decided that all these findings were “clear evidence” to be used in an international criminal tribunal against Syria.<sup>28</sup> Before this evidence was brought to light, the UN and international human rights organizations in their reports were already stressing that war crimes and crimes against humanity were being committed by the Syrian regime. However, it was the first time that a defector came forward and revealed the war crimes the State of Syria committed. In spite of this overwhelming evidence, Syria was not brought before the ICC. Human rights advocates are not only seeking ICC jurisdiction over Syria’s war crimes to hold it “accountable,” the goal is also to prevent the perpetrators of massacres against the Syrian people from participating in negotiations.

## The Rebels

Although, initially at the beginning of the protests, the majority of the human rights violations were committed by security forces of the Syrian government, some of the opposition groups, as stated by the UN and other international human rights organizations, committed violations such as extrajudicial killing and torture against civilians and security forces that surrendered. As armed groups are not a party to human rights conventions, they may appear not to be bound by the same conventions banning violations of human rights law. However, armed opposition groups

must respect humanitarian law, also called the “law of war” or the “law of armed conflicts.”<sup>29</sup> Any organization, party or community, no matter how they call themselves, who systematically violates the 3<sup>rd</sup> article of the Geneva Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, dated 1949, shall not be

Besides the regime and opponent groups, there is a third party in Syria, which is committing war crimes and crimes against humanity: DAISH. Mass executions, sexual slavery, torture, rape and mutilation are among the crimes this organization has committed. DAISH has continued to commit on “massive scale” war crimes in Syria.

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considered as “warring faction” but they shall be tried as war criminals or considered terrorists, according to the Geneva Conventions. As a result, groups who are engaged in armed struggle against the Syrian regime are obliged to obey humanitarian law. Therefore, armed and civilian opposition groups, which are scattered throughout Syria and abroad, are responsible for not only maintaining order in the regions they control but also acting according to human rights and humanitarian law while struggling against an undemocratic regime. This includes the responsibility to shield civilians from harm when they carry out attacks against military targets. Anti-Government armed groups, who conducted sporadic shelling of pro-government villages in Idlib and Damascus in particular, may also be guilty of crimes against humanity or war crimes.

The importance of non-state military actors in the Middle East increased dramatically after the Arab Spring. One of these actors involved in the civil war in Syria is Hezbollah. The approach of international law against these actors is also important to achieve an end of the civil war. Armed non-state actors cannot be excluded from the principles of international law. Today, burying one’s head in the sand and ignoring the role these non-state actors plays is downright dangerous. These armed groups have responsibilities under international law.<sup>30</sup>

Human rights organizations in Syria began to document the violations against human rights and humanitarian law when the coalition airstrikes were being conducted against DAISH. According to the latest figures released by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, since the beginning of the airstrikes on September 23, 2014, about 3,000 people were killed in US- coalition airstrikes on areas in Syria, including 162 civilians out of which 52 children and 35 women. Civilian casualties mostly arose from the bombings against oil facilities under IS control in al-Ha-

sakah, Deir al-Zour, al-Raqqa, Aleppo and Idlib, in northern Syria.<sup>31</sup> The Britain-based rights group also highlighted the slaughter committed by the international coalition between April 30 and May 1 in the village of Bir Mahali in Aleppo, where at least 64 people were killed.<sup>32</sup> “The Pentagon has generally denied that US-led coalition strikes have killed any civilians, despite persistent reports of scattered civilian deaths. But on May 22, the head of the US-led air campaign acknowledged that a November 2014 raid in Aleppo had killed two children - the first such admission from Washington.”<sup>33</sup>

## The Use of Chemical Weapons

The Syrian people faced grave human rights violations during the first year of the conflict; however, in the beginning, chemical weapons were not used against them. Nonetheless, the Syrian government stated for the first time on July 23, 2012 that it possessed “chemical and biological weapons but it will never use these weapons during internal conflicts unless Syria faces external intervention.”<sup>34</sup> The same year, the Syrian government and opposition groups accused each other of carrying out chemical attacks. Neither of these allegations was confirmed. On the other hand, western states, the US in particular, stated that Syria would face foreign intervention if it used weapons of mass destruction.<sup>35</sup> Meanwhile, other countries supporting Syria, such as Russia, stated that chemical weapons in Syria were under control and the

government had transferred chemical weapons to safer areas.

In the face of the reaction of the international community, Syria allowed UN inspectors to visit the regions where chemical weapons were allegedly used at the end of July 2013. While the UN team was in Syria, the opposition groups announced on August 21, 2013 that hundreds of people were killed in a chemical attack carried out in the East Ghouta district of Damascus by Assad forces.<sup>36</sup> While The Damascus administration denied responsibility for the attack, arguing that the opposition groups tried to distract the UN team in the country, the UN report that was submitted to the UN Security Council on September 16, 2013 confirms that chemical weapons were used on a large scale and resulted in numerous casualties, particularly among civilians, including many children.<sup>37</sup> Experts stated that there is no evidence indicating that the opposition groups possessed rockets mentioned in the report. The UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, stated that 85 percent of the samples contained sarin, the use of which is a war crime.<sup>38</sup>

Faced with the reaction of the international community and at the risk of military intervention, the Syrian regime approved the “Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and use of chemical Weapons and on their Destruction” on September 14, 2013 and agreed to announce its stock of chemical weapons and eliminate them with the help of the UN by mid-2014.

## The international community must accept its responsibility to investigate and prosecute war crimes and crimes against humanity in Syria

As of September 2014, ninety-six percent of Syria's declared chemical weapons had been destroyed.<sup>39</sup> Syria also has started the destruction of underground bunkers and hangars that were used for the production and storage of chemical weapons in 2015. However, in May 2015, international inspectors found traces of sarin and VX nerve agent at a military research site in Syria that had not been declared to the global chemical weapons watchdog.<sup>40</sup> The destruction of sarin is not the end of chemical attacks. Instead of sarin, the regime began to use another chemical that was not on the list of chemical weapons: Chlorine. The Syrian army has been using canisters and barrel bombs that contain chlorine against the rebels. One of the last chlorine attacks was carried out on Idlib in March 2015.

### Conclusion

In the span of five year, Syria became the greatest tragedy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Beside the humanitarian crisis, as a result of the influx of Syrian refugees, war crimes and crimes against humanity have been continuously committed. Chemical attacks and draconian methods of torture and

massacres, as a result of barrel bombs, still cannot be stopped. The international community and the UN have failed to take effective measures, as they could not act together. The UN Security Council has been unable to bring countries together against the crimes that are taking place in Syria. To date, the UN appointed three special envoys to bring a solution to this crisis but none have been successful. Even a permanent ceasefire to carry out humanitarian aid could not be reached or declared.

After the initial three years of the conflict, the UN Security Council did pass a resolution on February 22, 2014 in response to war crimes and crimes against humanity. Resolution 2139 demanded that all parties to the conflict immediately cease the indiscriminate use of weapons in populated areas; subjecting civilians to arbitrary detention, torture, and enforced disappearances; and restricting the delivery of humanitarian assistance. When the Syrian government failed to comply with this resolution, the Security Council adopted Resolution 2165, which authorized the delivery of humanitarian aid across borders and conflict lines by the UN and its implementing partners. Beside these unsuccessful resolutions, the Security Council has also failed to bring the Syrian case to the Prosecutor of the ICC. The Security Council resolution that would have made this referral possible was vetoed by Russia and China in May 2014.

The international community must accept its responsibility to investi-



gate and prosecute war crimes and crimes against humanity in Syria and must urgently motivate The UN Security Council to bring a case to the ICC against the perpetrators of these crimes. This will not only stop the bloodshed in Syria but will also prevent similar crimes in different regions of the world in the future. If not, it is clear that the ongoing war in Syria and immunity of the perpetrators of war crimes will be a sign to new and emerging violent actors in the Middle East that there is no need to respect human rights or humanitarian law or the rule of law in the region. ■

## Endnotes

1. Alawites has been living in Syria as a religious minority group and forms about 12% of the total population in Syria. The French Colonial Administration, which began after the First World War and lasted until 1943, backed them against Sunnis, who form the majority in the country. The French Administration appointed Alawites as state officials and military members. During the period of the French patronage, Alawites were promoted to higher offices, especially in the military. Following the independence of Syria, the military and also Alawites were the main actors in politics. The Assad family is also Alawite.
2. For detailed information see. Yavuz Güçtürk, "The Loss of Humanity: The Human Rights Dimension of the Civil War in Syria," *SETA Publications*, Ankara, p. 23-24.
3. "Worst of the Worst 2012: The World's Most Repressive Societies," *Freedom House*, [www.freedomhouse.org/report/special-reports/worst-worst-2012-worlds-most-repressive-societies](http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/special-reports/worst-worst-2012-worlds-most-repressive-societies).
4. See "Syria: An Amnesty International Briefing," *Amnesty International Publications* (November 1983)
5. Kurds comprise about 10 percent of the total population in Syria. In a 1962 census, Kurds were classified under three different categories: (1) citizens; (2) foreigners (*ajanib*, in Arabic); (3) and unregistered (*maktoumeen*, in Arabic). The citizen-Kurds have been issued official identity cards while the foreigners have been given red identity cards. About 300,000 Syrian Kurds were counted as "unregistered" and their properties were confiscated. In order to prevent the participation of the Kurdish population to the protests as of March 2011, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs in Syria announced that the Kurds, who do not have identity cards will benefit from the right of working as the citizens of Syria, according to a ministry decision dated March 7, 2011. See. Muhittin Ataman, "Suriye'de İktidar Mücadelesi" [Power Struggle in Syria], *SETA Report*, no. 6 (April 2012), p. 32.
6. "2010 Human Rights Report: Syria," <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/nea/154473.htm>.
7. Eyal Zisser, *Commanding Syria: Bashar al-Assad and the First Years in Power*, (I. B. Tauris, New York: 2007), p. 65.
8. "Syria: 'Death everywhere' - war crimes and human rights abuses in Aleppo, Syria", Amnesty International, 4 May 2015.
9. The UN officially expressed that the situation in Syria is a state of *civil war* with the statement of Hervé Ladsous, Under Secretary for Peacekeeping Operations. "Syria in civil war, says UN official Hervé Ladsous," *BBC News*, June 12, 2012.
10. "Pillay urges Syria to halt its assault on its own people," *The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)*, June 9, 2011.
11. Article 7, titled "Crimes against humanity," of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) reads, any of the following acts when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack. Some of these acts are: Murder, extermination; deportation or forcible transfer of population; imprisonment or other severe deprivation of physical liberty in violation of fundamental rules of international law; torture; rape; enforced disappearance of persons; attack directed against any civilian population; infliction of conditions of life; and deprivation of access to food and medicine.
12. Shabbiha militias, which were first mentioned in 1975, were used against rebels during 1982 Hama Massacre and are directly controlled by the Assad family. They reemerged after March 2011 and began to carry out attacks to suppress and frighten opposition groups by acting in parallel with the army and police forces.
13. "Bashar Al Assad: Criminal against Humanity - Report of human rights violations committed in Syria," *FIDH Report* (July 2011), [www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/reportSyria2807eng.pdf](http://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/reportSyria2807eng.pdf), p. 7.

14. Kashmira Gander, "UN to stop updating death toll in Syria conflict," *The Independent*, January 7, 2014.
15. The UN report was based on the records from different documentation groups and the Syrian Government. See, "Updated Statistical Analysis of Documentation of Killings in the Syrian Arab Republic," *The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights*, August, 2014.
16. "Syrian Civil War Death Toll Climbs over 320,000 Casualties; Observatory Group Slams International Community's Silence as Encouraging Bloodshed," *The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights*, June 16, 2015.
17. "Death Toll of April 2015," *Syrian Network for Human Rights*, May 1, 2015.
18. "More than 11000 explosive barrels dropped on people's heads over the past eight months," *The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights*, June 20, 2015.
19. "84 Victims Tortured to Death in May 2015," *Syrian Network for Human Rights*, June 3, 2015.
20. "Bashar Al Assad: Criminal against Humanity," *FIDH Report*, p. 5; "Crackdown in Syria: Terror in Tell Kalakh," *Amnesty International Publications*, July 2011, p.6 and "Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic," *UN Human Rights Council*, (A/HRC/23/58), June 4, 2013.
21. " 'I wanted to die' - Syria's torture survivors speak out," *Amnesty International Publications*, Mart 2012, p. 29.
22. "Torture Archipelago - Arbitrary Arrests, Torture, and Enforced Disappearances in Syria's Underground Prisons since March 2011," *Human Rights Watch*, July 2012.
23. "Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic," *UN Human Rights Council*, (A/HRC/23/58), p. 15-16.
24. "Syrian Women & Girls: No Safe Refuge," *Refugees International Field Report*, November 16, 2012.
25. "Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic," *UN Human Rights Council*, (A/HRC/24/46), p. 18.
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