

No less than 534 Barrel Bombs in October 2017

SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

Thursday, November 9, 2017

The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), founded in June 2011, is a non-governmental, independent group that is considered a primary source for the OHCHR on all death toll-related analyses in Syria.



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I. Introduction

The fourth round of negotiations was held in Astana city, Kazakhstan's capital, on 3 and 4 of May 2017. Russian, Turkish, and Iranian representatives attended as the sponsoring states of Ankara Ceasefire Agreement. The three states agreed on establishing four de-escalation zones, wherein the agreement is to commence on May 6, 2017. The agreement outlined four major areas for the de-escalation in Idlib governorate and the surrounding areas (parts of Aleppo, Hama, and Latakia governorates), northern Homs governorate, Eastern Ghouta, and parts of Daraa and al Quneitra governorates in the southern parts of Syria. It was provided that a special committee would accurately assign the borders of said zones at a later date. The agreement provided for a cessation of combat operations, passage of humanitarian aids, and for IDPs to go back to their areas.

Following an extensive round of talks between Russia, USA, and Jordan that commenced in May 2017 in Amman, Jordan's capital, the American and Russian presidents announced, on the sidelines of the 2017 G20 summit in Hamburg, that a ceasefire agreement has been reached in southwestern Syria – Daraa, Quneitra, and Suwayda governorates. The agreement went into force at 12:00 on Sunday July 9, 2017, and provided for the passage of humanitarian aids in addition to a ceasefire between the conflicting parties (Syrian regime forces and their allies on one side, and armed opposition factions on the other side). Also, the agreement specifies that maintaining security in this region is the Russian forces' responsibility in coordination with the Americans and Jordanians.



In addition, there have been a number of other local agreements in July and August 2017, such as Eastern Ghouta agreement between armed opposition factions, on one side, and officials from the Russian side, while a similar agreement was struck with the opposition in northern suburbs of Homs. However, the texts of these agreements haven't been made public on Russian government's websites, and the same for armed opposition factions who didn't publicize these agreements, except for Failaq al Rahman who published the [text of the agreement](#) on their official website. At the end of the agreement, according to the copy on Failaq al Rahman's website, a signature by a Russian sponsor was shown but without an explicit name, which was a grave mistake, as apparently all of this helps the sponsoring Russian side to easily dissolve from these agreements with no subsequent political or legal obligations and repercussions.

On Saturday, July 22, 2017, Russian Ministry of Defense announced that a de-escalation agreement has been signed in Eastern Ghouta following a round of talks between Russian military officials, on one side, and Jaish al Islam faction, on the other side, in Egypt's capital Cairo. The agreement was to come into effect at 12:00 of the same day. On Wednesday, August 16, 2017, a Failaq al Rahman representative and a Russian representative signed an agreement in Geneva city that established Failaq al Rahman's inclusion in the de-escalation zone in Eastern Ghouta. The agreement was to come into effect at 21:00 of Friday, August 18, 2017.

On Monday, July 31, 2017, another de-escalation agreement was signed in Egypt's capital Cairo for northern Homs suburbs and southern Hama suburbs following a round of talks between armed opposition factions in the area and the Syrian regime represented by the Russian government as a sponsoring party, as the agreement was to commence at 12:00 on Thursday, August 3, 2017.

Most notably, the two most recent agreements provided for a full cessation of hostilities between the conflicting parties in the relevant areas -with the exclusion of the areas in which ISIS and Hay'at Tahrir al Sham are present- and for humanitarian aids to enter these areas and for detainees to be released as per the demands of each party as to which detainees are to be released.

Despite all of this, breaches haven't stopped, mainly by the Syrian regime, who is seemingly the party that would be most affected should the ceasefire go on, and in particular extrajudicial killing crimes and, more horrendously, deaths due to torture. This strongly asserts that there is a ceasefire of some sort on the table, but the crimes that the international community -especially the guarantors- won't see are still going on as nothing had changed.



With the end of the sixth round of talks in the Kazakhstani capital, Astana, which were held over the course of two days (September 14-15, 2017), a de-escalation zone was [established](#) in Idlib governorate and the surrounding areas, as military forces were to be deployed (Russian, Turkish, and Iranian) to monitor the agreement, with the passage of humanitarian aids.

On September 19, Syrian-Russian alliance started a heavy offensive against Idlib governorate in response to Hay'at Tahrir al Sham's "Ya Ebadallah Uthbotou" battle, supported by some opposition faction (The Islamic Turkistani Party, Jaish al Izza, and Jaish al Nukhba), Hay'at. Subsequently, The Syrian-Russian alliance expanded the offensive to include the suburbs of Aleppo and Hama governorates and Eastern Ghouta in Damascus suburbs.

On October 8, 2017, Jaish al Islam, Aknaf Bait al Maqdis, and Jaish al Ababil (armed opposition factions) signed an agreement with a Russian Ministry of Defense representative in the Egyptian capital Cairo. [The agreement](#) stated that southern Damascus city would be added to the de-escalation zones, as the agreement was to come into force at 12:00 of October 12, 2017. The agreement provided for a ceasefire in the area, and ensured that the area residents would not be displaced, in addition to the passage of humanitarian aids to the area.

The Kazakhstani Minister of Foreign Affairs read the final statement of the guarantor states (Russia, Turkey, Iran) at the conclusion of the final session of Astana talks' round 7 that were held on 30th and 31st of October 2017. The guarantor states called on the parties to the conflict in Syria to take steps towards building trust, including releasing detainees and forcibly-disappeared persons, delivering dead bodies, and ensure the passage of humanitarian aids into besieged areas.

In October, Syrian regime forces dropped more than two times the number of barrel bombs dropped in last September. We have recorded that Syrian regime forces continued to drop barrel bombs on Deir Ez-Zour governorate for the second month in a row – 20% of all barrel bombs dropped this month.

Vitaly Churkin, the former Russian representative to the United Nations, said that the Syrian regime has stopped using barrel bombs. However, the daily monitoring and documentation conducted by SNHR prove, beyond any doubt, otherwise as the Syrian regime continues to kill and destroy Syria by dropping hundreds of barrel bombs. In this report, we are going to highlight the incidents in which we documented the use of barrel bombs particularly with place, date, and pictures. This report is a monthly report by SNHR.



A distinctively indiscriminate weapon with huge destructive impact, a barrel bomb doesn't only kill civilians but also terrorizes and displaces residents in light of the destruction it creates. Dropping barrel bombs from warplanes in this savage and primitive manner amounts to a war crime. Every barrel bomb dropped is considered a war crime.

According to SNHR's violation archive, the first notable use of barrel bombs by Syrian regime forces (Army, security, local militias, Shiite foreign militias) was on Monday, April 1, 2012 against the residents of Salqin city in Idlib governorate. Barrel bombs is a locally-made weapon which is used by Syrian regime forces due to the fact that it costs notably less than missiles and it has a huge destructive impact. The use of barrel bombs is based on the principle of free fall and it weighs sometimes more than one-fourth ton and it is a distinctively indiscriminate weapon. even if barrel bombs killed an armed man, this would be an accident as 99% of the victims killed by barrel bombs are civilians and the percentage of women and children victims varies between 12% to 35% in some cases.

Security Council adopted Resolution 2139 on February 22, 2016 which specifically condemns the use of barrel bombs: "cease all attacks against civilians, as well as the indiscriminate employment of weapons in populated areas, including shelling and aerial bombardment, such as the use of barrel bombs." Nonetheless, Syrian regime forces are still, at the time of this report, dropping barrel bombs on armed opposition-held areas on a daily basis.

In some cases, we documented the use of barrel bombs loaded with poison gases by Syrian regime forces which is a violation of Security Council Resolution 2118, adopted on September 27, 2013, and Resolution 2209, adopted on April 6, 2015.

This report monitors the number of barrel bombs that were dropped across Syria, and the death toll it causes. In light of the difficulties our teams encounter, it should be noted that this the bare minimum of the actual magnitude of crimes.

The ruling regime possesses fixed-wing warplanes and helicopters. However, the regime denies that it is using barrel bombs the same way it denies perpetrating other violations such as murder, arrest, enforced-disappearance, and torture among others. In contrast, the regime denies the International Independent Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic access to Syria, and bans local and international human rights organizations and independent media. Therefore, this report doesn't include the remaining three parties (Self-management forces, extremist Islamic groups, and armed opposition factions) as none of them has an air force.

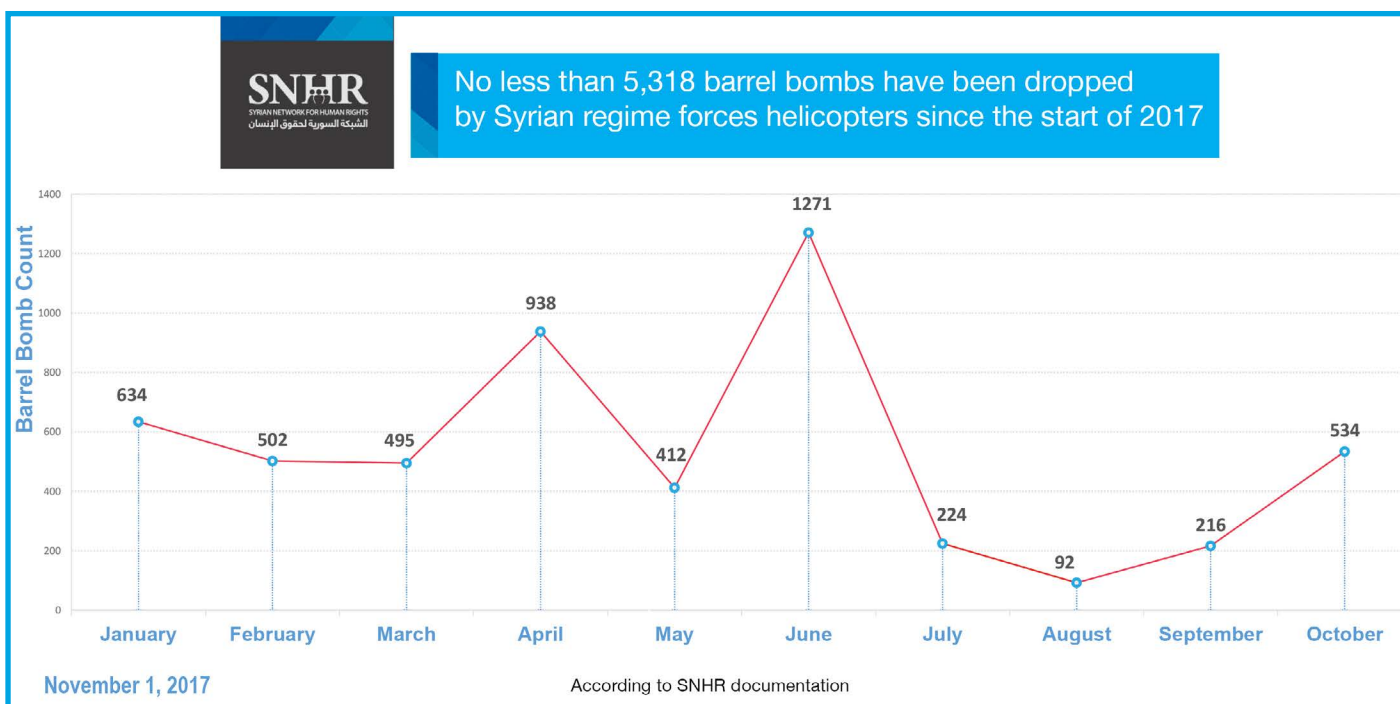


All the reports and studies done by SNHR show that most of the attacks were deliberately against residential areas and vital centers in order to demolish any chances to establish an alternative state and an alternative authority in the areas that are not controlled by Syrian regime forces. Otherwise, what is the point of targeting areas that are tens of kilometers away from the frontlines?

II. Executive Summary

A. Use of barrel bombs in 2017

SNHR has documented that 5,318 barrel bombs have been dropped by Syrian regime forces helicopters between the start of 2017 and November of the same year.



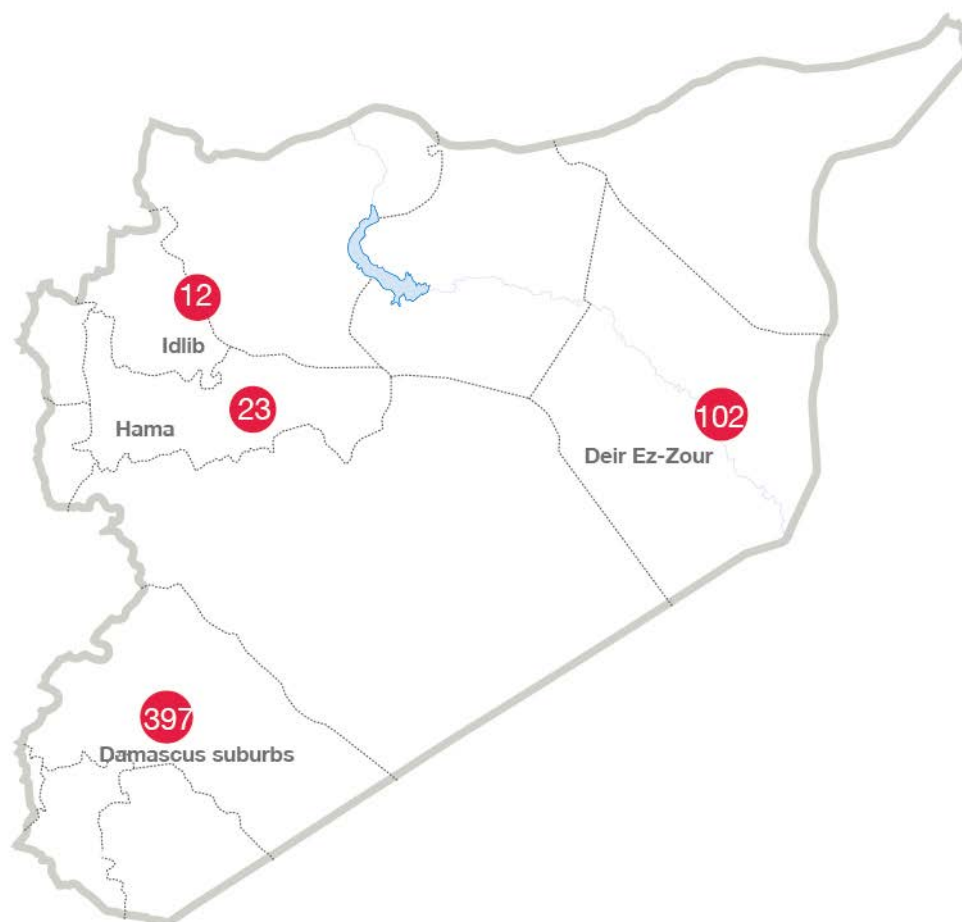
B. Use of barrel bombs in October 2017

First: Toll of barrel bombs

Through daily monitoring and documenting, SNHR team was able to record that 534 barrel bombs at least were dropped in October 2017 by Syrian regime forces helicopters.



No less than 534 barrel bombs were dropped by Syrian regime helicopters in October 2017



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According to SNHR documentation

According to SNHR's victim documentation team, six civilians, including three children, were killed in barrel bombs attacks. All victims were killed in Deir Ez-Zour governorate.

III. Details

Most notable deaths caused by barrel bombs

Deir Ez-Zour governorate

Thursday, October 5, 2017, Syrian regime forces helicopters dropped a number of barrel bombs on [al Mayadeen](#) city, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, which resulted in the killing of one civilian. The city was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.



Friday, October 20, 2017, Syrian regime forces helicopters dropped three barrel bombs on [Theban](#) town, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, which resulted in the killing of three children. The town was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

Friday, October 20, 2017, Syrian regime forces helicopters dropped a number of barrel bombs on al Hawayej village, eastern suburbs of Deir Ez-Zour governorate, which resulted in the killing of two civilians (a father and his son). The village was under the control of ISIS at the time of the incident.

VI. Appendixes and Attachments

Video showing a [number of barrel bombs](#) being dropped by Syrian regime forces helicopters and their explosion in al Latamena town, northwestern suburbs of Hama governorate – Friday, October 27, 2017

IV. Legal Conclusions and Recommendations

Legal conclusions

1- The Syrian government has, beyond any doubt, violated Security Council Resolutions 2139 and Security Council Resolution 2254. Syrian regime forces used barrel bombs in a widespread and systematic manner and violated, through the crime of willful killing, Article 7 of the Rome Statute in a widespread and systematic manner as well which constitutes crimes against humanity. Additionally, the Syrian government violated many rules of the international humanitarian law by perpetrating tens of crimes that amount to war crimes which manifested in the indiscriminate and random bombardment that was also disproportionate due to the use of excessive force.

2- SNHR can confirm that the bombardment using barrel bombs is an indiscriminate bombardment that targeted unarmed civilians. Thus, Syrian regime forces have violated the rules of the international human rights law which guarantee the right to life. Additionally, considering that these crimes were perpetrated during non-international armed conflict, these crimes amount to a war crime where all the elements of a war crimes were fulfilled.

3-the Indiscriminate attacks carried out by Syrian regime forces are considered a violation of the customary humanitarian international law, where Syrian regime forces fired shells on residential areas and it wasn't directed against a specific military target.

4- These attacks, especially bombardment, have caused collateral damages that involved casualties, injuries, and great damages to civil facilities. There are strong indicators that suggest that the damage was considerably excessive in relation to the estimated military benefit.



5- The magnitude of the widespread frequent bombardment, the excessive force, the indiscriminate manner, and the coordinated approach of these attacks must be based on high orders and a state policy.

6- Syrian regime forces, including all forms and leaders, are involved in perpetrating crimes against humanity and war crimes against the Syrian people in addition to those who provide Syrian regime forces with financial, political, and military support -such as the Russian government, the Iranian government, and the Lebanese group Hezbollah among others. Also, the companies that supply weapons are considered partners in these crimes and are subject to criminal prosecution.

Recommendations

The Security Council

- The Security Council must insure the serious implementation of its Resolutions. These Resolutions have become merely words and, thus, the Security Council has lost all of its credibility and purpose.
- An arms embargo must be imposed on the Syrian government Also, all those who supply it with weapons and funding must be prosecuted considering the risk that these weapons might be used to commit crimes and serious violations of human rights.
- In the Syrian case, The Security Council is the one who is authorized to refer the case to the International Criminal Court. However, the Security Council has been obstructing this procedure for five years instead of facilitating it and working on instilling peace and security in Syria. The prosecution of everyone involved in crimes against humanity and war crimes must commence immediately.

Acknowledgment and Consolation

Our most heartfelt condolences for the families and friends of the victims, and our thanks go out to all local activists and families who contributed majorly to this study and the investigations.





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