


WAR CRIMINAL RUSSIA AND ITS REENTRANCE IN THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

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مركز البحوث الإنسانية و الاجتماعية

To cite this article: Shaherhawasli, Kenda. "War Criminal Russia and Its Reentrance in the UN Human Rights Council", *INSAMER*, 01.12.2020.  Analysis

Days after its renewed membership in the UNHRC on October 13, 2020, Russia hastened to establish its entitlement by committing a new massacre to add to its criminal record in Syria.

On October 26 Russian aircraft bombed the Douilla village in the north of Idlib, northwestern Syria. It killed 80 people and injured more than 120; a clear violation of the armistice agreement on Syria between Russia and Turkey. This escalation came just days after Russian rockets targeted a popular fuel market in Jarabulus city, which caused massive explosions, following a violent bombing against Jabal al-Zawiya villages.

These violations coincided with the fifth year of Russian intervention in Syria, which prevented the Assad regime from falling after losing control of more than 70% of the country when the opposition forces were threatening the outskirts of the capital.

War crimes, prohibited weapons against civilians

Since September 2015, the Syrian Network for Human Rights has documented 6,859 civilian deaths, including 2,005 children and 969 women as a result of Russian incursions in Syria. The report calculated at least 354 massacres committed by Russian forces and 1,217 attacks on vital civilian centers, including 222 schools and 207 medical facilities, killing 69 medical staff, 42 civil defense staff, and 22 journalists.

Russia also carried out 236 cluster munition attacks, 125 of which were with incendiary weapons such as white phosphorus, an internationally prohibited weapon. Their targets appear to be concentrated on civilians. In addition, since 2018, Russian forces have been involved in ground operations, using artillery and tanks, and has brought the "Wagner group,"



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Russian militias under the security companies name, to fight alongside their official forces.

Since December 2019, Russia has worked to use the remaining Syrian fighters to work for them by luring them with huge salaries and other incentives, including offering them exemption from compulsory military service in the regime army, in exchange for being transferred to Libya to fight alongside the forces of General “Khalifa Haftar,” a UN report said.

On the other hand, Sergei Shoygu, Russian Defense Minister, confirmed that Russia tested 162 types of new and sophisticated weapons in Syria. These new weapons were being used for the first time, which gave Russia the chance to demonstrate its new war power.¹

Distorting the facts

Russia was not content only with providing its political and military support for the Assad regime, but it also clearly distorted many facts and contested a lot of evidence indicating its involvement with the Assad regime in war crimes against Syrians. The new OPCW report, for one, said that Russia and the Assad regime falsely accused factions of the Armed Opposition of using chemical weapons in Aleppo on November 24, 2018.²

The Russian fighters and the Syrian regime provided access to environmental samples such as fragments of weapons used that they collected themselves. The Fact-Finding Mission assessed the samples as low-value evidence, insufficient to establish a link between the reported incident and the samples after being analyzed in OPCW designated laboratories. The report notes that Russia and the Syrian regime tried to mislead and deceive the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in the Aleppo incident, with the extent of Russia’s interest, concern, and follow-up showing that it is a key partner in fabricating the Aleppo incident.

Several times, the Russian Foreign Ministry has accused local opposition factions, and the Syrian Civil Defense known as the White

Helmet, of preparing chemical weapons attacks to accuse the Syrian regime. On November 26, 2019, the Russian Defense Ministry said that “a group of fighters, jointly with the White Helmets organization, plan to carry out provocations involving staged air raids and use of chemical weapons in populated areas of the Idlib de-escalation zone.”³

16 Vetoes against human rights resolutions

Russia obstructed the protection of civilians by using its veto 16 times in UN Security Council to stop any resolution or move aimed at protecting civilians and alleviating their suffering.

For example, Russia used its veto power against a draft resolution referring Syria to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in 2014, in addition to using its veto power to cancel a UN investigation mechanism on the use of chemical weapons and adjudicate in 2017.⁴ More recently, it withdrew from the de-confliction mechanisms to protect hospitals, schools, and other civilian infrastructure from indiscriminate attacks in Syria and again it used its veto on the matter of the cross-border humanitarian aid delivery authorization.

In total, the Human Rights Council has issued 34 resolutions on the human rights situation in Syria since 2011. Russia voted against all of them and tried to question them.

Missing standards and rights

Five years after Russia’s military intervention in Syria which reversed the balance of power in favor of the Assad regime and saved it from collapse, many Syrians wonder about the world standards by which the United Nations and other international organizations are managed, which allow war criminals to participate in relationship to peace, security, and human rights decisions that would determine the end or continuation of the suffering of civilians in the world.

They also wonder about the world values that the international community is cherished by, which



are based on freedom, justice, and democratic values, and sanctified human rights issues, as long as these values are no more than a dead letter and are often frustrated by the despotic and dictatorial countries who are facing their people with oppression, tyranny, and humiliation.

Even after all these painful years in Syria, even with thousands of pieces of evidence and hundreds of thousands of videos and photos of unimaginable crimes, the international community, and its affiliates are still unable to

stop the Syrians from suffering. These people carry with them a hundred thousand stories about their experience being refugees, forcibly displaced, detained, and victimized.

At the same time, the Assad regime, the culprit, which has crossed all red lines and ignored all resolutions, is living unaccountably, while the countries supporting him alongside UN Security and the Human Rights Councils, leading the world's decisions towards more chaos, injustice, and violations.

Endnotes

- ¹ Russian Defense Minister Says His Military Has Tested 162 Weapons In Syria, 23/2/2017, <https://n.pr/3ov3Stc>
- ² NOTE BY THE TECHNICAL SECRETARIAT," REPORT OF THE OPCW FACT-FINDING MISSION IN SYRIA ,REGARDING THE INCIDENT IN ALEPPO, SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC ON 24 NOVEMBER 2018" ,OPCW,1/9/2020, <https://bit.ly/3dZ12I6>
- ³ Militants, White Helmets staging chemical provocations in Syria — Russian Defense Ministry, RUSSIAN NEWS AGENCY, 26/11/2019, <https://bit.ly/34uNJfy>
- ⁴ Eleven Countries Voted against Human Rights Council Resolutions Condemning Violations against the Syrian People Since March 2011, the Syrian network for human rights, 22/9/2020, <https://bit.ly/2TtbFth>