



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on September 12, 2013

UN Report Accuses Both Sides in Syria of War Crimes

A four-person United Nations rights panel has released a [report](#) citing evidence of war crimes by both sides in Syria. The report comes at a critical moment when the United States and Russia are working to determine the best course of action in Syria.



The report was created by the Commission of Inquiry, which was expanded last fall and is led by Paulo Pinheiro of Brazil. The report is to be presented to the United Nations Human Rights Council on Monday. It relies mostly on interviews with refugees and defectors, as the panel has not been allowed to enter Syria. The data in the report also comes from photographs, video and satellite imagery, and forensic and medical records analyzed by investigators, including former UN war crimes prosecutor Carla del Ponte.

The report is the result of months of investigations that began after the panel issued warnings in February that both sides were committing war crimes and that the violence was worsening as a result of increasing sectarianism and the influence of foreign fighters. At the time the warning was issued, the panel encouraged the United Nations Security Council to refer those responsible for the war crimes to the International Criminal Court.

According to the data cited by the rights panel, both the Assad regime and the anti-Assad rebels are guilty of murder, torture, rape, and indiscriminate attacks on civilians.

The accusations against both sides in the report should come as no surprise, as atrocities at the hands of the Assad regime have been [documented](#) for years, and despite media-driven propaganda, the anti-Assad rebels have been proven to have connections to al-Qaeda and have even claimed blame for monstrous crimes, such as eating body parts of its enemies.

In August 2012, *Reuters* wrote, "Recent news reports from the region have suggested that the influence and numbers of Islamist militants, some of them connected to al Qaeda or its affiliates, have been growing among Assad's opponents."

And in its report covering the Syrian uprising in August 2012, the BBC [wrote](#):

The al-Qaeda-styled group in Syria is Jabhat al-Nusra li-Ahl al-Sham (the Front for the Protection of the Syrian People).

Like other al-Qaeda affiliated groups, al-Nusra's statements and videos are usually issued by its own media group, al-Manara al-Baida (the White Minaret) in Syria.

Al-Nusra has claimed responsibility for several attacks against the Syrian army, security and shabiha (state-sponsored thugs) since it announced its formation early this year.



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In addition to having connections to al-Qaeda, experts have long accused the rebels of committing atrocities, even those that the rebels attempted to pin on the Assad regime.

For example, the rebels have recently accused President Assad's regime of launching a [chemical attack](#) on Syrian opposition, but experts have questioned the validity of the claims.

"Firstly, the timing is odd, bordering on suspicious," writes BBC security correspondent Frank Gardner. "Why would the Assad government, which has recently been retaking ground from the rebels, carry out a chemical attack while UN weapons inspectors are in the country?"

CBS News writer Tucker Reals [observed](#) that there has been no substantial evidence cited to support allegations against the Assad regime:

With the possible exception of the intercepted phone calls, and the claim by Cameron on Thursday that regime soldiers had taken precautions typical of chemical weapons use, the vast majority of the evidence of Assad regime culpability presented by both Cameron, the Obama administration and their allies in France, Turkey and other nations, is circumstantial in nature.

It hinges largely on the argument, as Cameron put it Thursday, that there are simply "no plausible alternate scenarios."

But as [noted](#) by the *New York Times*, the data presented by the UN council accuses the government forces of committing far more war crimes than the rebels. The *New York Times* reported, "The report was careful to hold both sides responsible, but the unevenness of the conflict — with heavily armed government forces battling rebels with scanty, sometimes homemade arsenals — was evident."

The report details nine mass killings, and attributes eight of them to the government side, and just one to the rebels. The report is dated August 16 and therefore does not include details for the August 21 chemical weapons attack in Damascus that both sides have accused the other of launching.

"Relentless shelling has killed thousands of civilians and displaced the populations of entire towns," the report said, implying that the guilt lies with the government. "Massacres and other unlawful killings are perpetrated with impunity. An untold number of men, children and women have disappeared. Many have died in detention."

The one massacre attributed to the rebel forces in the report is that mass killing of Shiite residents in the Hatla district of Deir al-Zour in June. The report indicates that the rebels performed executions of captured government soldiers and that the rebels have been recruiting children for combat. It also accuses the rebels of performing acts of torture and that the instances of torture "are on the rise."

"Anti-government armed group fighters conducted home invasions, killing and summarily executing (by shooting at close range) many Shia including at least 30 civilians, among them children, women and elderly," the report said.

Still, even as the report accuses the government of more atrocities than the rebels, it seems to prove what some of the more level-headed members of Congress have asserted all along — that both sides of the Syrian dispute are guilty of heinous crimes and that it is in the United States' best interest to stay out of Syria's affairs.

Kentucky Senator Rand Paul, blasting President Obama's call for intervention in Syria, said, "Americans by a large majority want nothing to do with the Syrian civil war. We fail to see a national security interest in a war between a leader who gasses his own citizens and Islamic rebels who are killing Christians." Paul recognizes that the American people are being asked to choose between the lesser of



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two evils, a decision that ultimately involves choosing evil.

The panel urges the international community to discontinue arms transfers to Syria and take “tangible steps to curb the increasing influence of extremists.” It also emphasizes that no military solution is possible. “The perpetrators of these violations and crimes, on all sides, act in defiance of international law,” the report said. “They do not fear accountability. Referral to justice is imperative.”



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