

## Fact Sheet: Assad's Barrel Bombs

### *What is a barrel bomb?*

A barrel bomb is an improvised explosive device, or IED, that is dropped from the air. They are typically filled with high explosives, oil, gasoline, shrapnel or chemicals. While they are most typically made out of barrels (hence the name), the term "barrel bombs" has come to refer to any unguided, cheaply-made explosive device that can be used in aerial bombardment. They also include some cluster munitions. Barrel bombs have been declared illegal under international conventions.

Barrel bombs are highly destructive due to the large amount of explosives that can be packed into the receptacle. Because of their lack of accuracy and indiscriminate use in populated areas, barrel bombs are also arbitrary in their killing. Their widespread use against civilian populations and neighborhoods in cities like Aleppo and Damascus have left homes, streets, and basic infrastructure destroyed. This has made daily life unlivable in many areas.



*Aftermath of a barrel bomb attack in Aleppo, March 7, 2014 (Human Rights Watch)*<sup>ii</sup>

### *What types of barrel bombs does the regime use?*

Most barrel bombs are made with high explosives and shrapnel. While earlier barrel bombs were made with between 200 and 300 pounds of explosives, newer weapons are made with 2000 pounds of explosive material.<sup>iii</sup>

Chemical barrel bombs were reportedly used in a spate of attacks between April and May 2014. (See "**Fact Sheet: Regime Chemical Weapons Attacks**" for more details.) Chlorine and ammonia have been used in barrel bomb attacks in civilian areas as recently as September.<sup>iv</sup>

The Hague-based Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) said in a September 10 report that it had found compelling evidence chemical weapons had been used "systematically and repeatedly" in Syria this year and that allegations of their use had increased since August.<sup>v</sup> This is a direct Assad violation of the 2013 chemical weapons deal that replaced U.S. airstrikes on regime targets.

### *Where are barrel bombings occurring?*

- Some 5,000 to 6,000<sup>vi</sup> barrel bombs have been dropped in Syria since March 2011;
- An estimated average 20 barrel bombs are dropped every day in Syria;<sup>vii</sup>
- Over 20,000 people are estimated to have been killed by barrel bombs in Syria, averaging 50 civilian casualties per day;<sup>viii</sup>

Aleppo, Syria's largest and oldest city, has absorbed the majority of barrel bomb attacks;<sup>ix</sup> Just outside Aleppo, the Syrian army operates so-called "defense labs," or "muamel al-defa," where they create barrel bombs and other munitions. The defense labs are also used as a launch point for helicopter attacks on Aleppo and the surrounding countryside. But barrel bombings occur in rebel-controlled areas across Syria every day -- in Deraa, Homs, Idlib Hama and the Damascus suburbs.

### ***Attacks against civilians:***

There is ample evidence showing that the Assad government extensively targets civilian areas in its bombing campaigns. In a report commissioned in July 2014, the Syrian Network for Human Rights estimated the number of civilians killed by barrel bombs at around 50,000, with 23 percent of these casualties being children.<sup>x</sup>

*"By using barrel bombs on densely populated areas, Syrian government forces are using means and methods of warfare that do not distinguish between civilians, who are accorded protection under the laws of war, and combatants, making attacks indiscriminate and therefore unlawful."* - Human Rights Watch.<sup>xi</sup>

### ***Geneva II Peace Accords:***

Geneva II ended up being one of the bloodiest periods in the Syrian conflict, due to the regime's bombardment of Aleppo City. The Assad regime used this period to weaken the opposition, strengthen its battlefield position and undermined the peace summit aimed at mitigating the suffering of Syrian people.<sup>xii</sup>

While the peace talks were going on, there were reports of Syrian Army build-up near the town of Yabroud, an opposition held town in the Qalamoun Mountains near the border with Lebanon.<sup>xiii</sup> The UN High Commission for Human Rights reported, "According to reports we've received from within Syria, there have been numerous aerial attacks and shelling along with a military buildup around the town."<sup>xiv</sup>

While the peace talks were occurring, there were several reports that the Assad government continued to bomb civilians, including one attack that saw well over 300 people killed, including several children.<sup>xv</sup>

### ***What has the International Community Done?***

In early 2014, the UN Security Council ordered all sides to cease the usage of barrel bombings. The regime was at the time and remains the only side using barrel bombs. Since the UN Security Council ordered all sides to stop using barrel bombs, over 700 discrete sites have appeared in Aleppo alone.<sup>xvi</sup> This is compared to 350 sites bombed in an identical time period before the order.

Even though an international coalition led by the U.S. recently initiated air strikes against ISIS in Syria and Iraq, no efforts have been made to stop the Assad regime's barrel bombings. In fact, Assad forces have increase the number of their sorties. One day in the first month of airstrikes, Assad forces executed 40 bombing runs in and around Aleppo, which is double their normal rate.<sup>xvii</sup> They still carry out attacks everyday throughout the country, sometimes in airspace recently vacated by Coalition jets.

\*\* Click to see an [interactive map](#) of Aleppo's bombardment.<sup>xviii</sup>

## End Notes:

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Koshka, Cherneyy. 10/01/2014 therawreport.net. "Syria Report from Aleppo 9/30/2014: Assad Continues Targeting Civilians."