

## Rights Group:

# U.S. Accountable for Civilian Deaths Near Aleppo

## 'Daesh Holds Only Six Districts in Western Mosul'



Syrian civil defense volunteers dig through the rubble of a mosque following a reported airstrike in the village of Jineh in Aleppo province, Syria, March 17, 2017.

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) – Human Rights Watch says the U.S. military failed to take “necessary precautions” to prevent dozens of civilian deaths last month in an airstrike that targeted a mosque full of people in a village west of Syria’s city of Aleppo.

“United States forces appear to have failed to take necessary precautions to avoid civilian

casualties” in the strike on the village of Jineh on March 17, the HRW said in a report on Tuesday. Ole Solvang, the HRW’s deputy emergencies director, held the United States accountable for the civilian deaths. “The U.S. seems to have gotten several things fundamentally wrong in this attack, and dozens of civilians paid the price.”

“The U.S. authorities need to

figure out what went wrong, start doing their homework before they launch attacks, and make sure it doesn’t happen again,” Solvang said.

The HRW report is based on interviews with more than a dozen people with firsthand knowledge of the strike. The rights body also worked with organizations to analyze the imagery of the attack and

reconstruct the assault.

“Any attempt to verify through people with local knowledge what kind of building this was would likely have established that the building was a mosque.”

The rights group also stated that it had found no evidence that terrorists were inside the mosque.

Elsewhere in the report, the HRW said even if they had been “striking a mosque just before prayer and then attack people attempting to flee, without knowing whether they were civilians or combatants, may well have been disproportionate or indiscriminate.”

“Indiscriminate or disproportionate attacks violate the laws of war, as does failing to take all feasible precautions to minimize civilian deaths.”

The HRW said it had submitted its findings to the U.S. Central Command.

At least 49 civilians were killed and over 100 people were wounded in the airstrike on March 16.

Meanwhile, Syrian army troops have been engaged in fierce clashes with terrorists in the city of Aleppo in northern Syria.

Syria has been fighting different foreign-sponsored terrorists and terrorist groups since March 2011. UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura estimated last August that more than 400,000 people had been killed in the crisis until then. No up-to-date official tallies are available from the Syrian conflict.



A member of the Iraqi security forces loads a TOW anti-tank missile as government troops advance towards Mosul’s Old City on April 17, 2017, during an offensive to recapture the city from Daesh terrorists.

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) – A high-ranking Iraqi military figure says Daesh Takfiri terrorists are only in control of six neighborhoods in the western part of Mosul as government forces, backed by volunteer fighters from Popular Mobilization Units, are battling to expel the extremists out of the country’s second largest city.

The commander of the Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS), Lieutenant General Talib Shaghatai, said on Tuesday that military forces continue to gain ground against Daesh militants, and are steadily liberating the remaining militant-held areas in western Mosul, Arabic-language and official al-Sabaah (The Morning) daily newspaper reported.

Shaghatai added that Iraqi forces and their allies have already purged the Takfiris from 32 districts out of the total 38 in addition to the strategic Mosul International Airport and Ghazlani military base.

The remarks came a day after Hossam al-Abbar, a member of the Nineveh provincial council, also said in a statement that security forces had been in control of 75

percent of the western side of Mosul.

He said battles were concentrated around the centuries-old Grand al-Nuri Mosque, and troops were preparing to storm the area with snipers, hand grenades and assault rifles.

Abbar stressed that government forces would not use artillery units and airstrikes during the forthcoming offensive in order to prevent civilian casualties.

Earlier on Tuesday, an unnamed spokesman for CTS forces said the troops were advancing in al-Thawra and al-Tanak districts of western Mosul.

The media bureau of the Iraqi Joint Operations Command also announced in a statement that armed CASC Rainbow drones of the Iraqi army had targeted and destroyed a militant position and a fuel station for Daesh terrorists in al-Ba’aj town west of Mosul.

The statement noted that the precision strikes were launched based on information from the Directorate General for Intelligence and Security.

## Tel Aviv Rejects Negotiation With Hunger Strikers

TEL AVIV (Dispatches) – The occupying regime of Israeli’s public security minister vowed on Tuesday not to negotiate with hundreds of Palestinian prisoners on the second day of a hunger strike led by popular leader Marwan Barghouti.

As many as 1,500 Palestinians in Israeli prisons launched the hunger strike on Monday. Gilad Erdan said the prisoners were “getting what they deserve and we have no reason to negotiate with them.”

He said Barghouti had been placed in solitary confinement because calling for the hunger strike was against prison rules.

Erdan had said on Monday: “Barghouti, the leader of the hunger strikers, is politically motivated by (his campaign for) the Palestinian leadership, and includes unreasonable demands on the conditions of the prisoners.”

Issa Qaraq, the head of prisoner affairs for the Palestinian Authority, said on Monday that about 1,300 prisoners were on hunger strike and the number could rise. The Palestinian Prisoners’ Club had put the number at 1,500.

Tens of thousands of Palestinians marched through the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to show their support for the strike. Hamas, which runs Gaza, saluted the “brave prisoners” on hunger strike.

In Ramallah, an estimated 2,000 people gathered in Yasser Arafat Square, with some announcing they were prepared to join the protest.

Zionist prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, did not comment directly on the protest, but on Tuesday called Barghouti an “arch-terrorist”.

His war minister, Avigdor Lieberman, said he wanted to take the approach of former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher, who publicly refused to accede to the demands of IRA hunger strikers in 1981, 10 of whom died.

Some 6,500 Palestinians are currently in jail in occupied territories. Of those, 62 are women and 300 are minors.

Some 500 are held under administrative detention, which allows for imprisonment without charge.

Palestinian prisoners have mounted repeated hunger strikes, but rarely on such a large scale.

Barghouti’s call for the strike has

given it added credibility, with the 57-year-old serving five life sentences over his role in the second Palestinian intifada or uprising.

He is popular among Palestinians, with polls suggesting he could win the Palestinian presidency.

“Decades of experience have proved that Israel’s inhumane system of colonial and military occupation aims to break the spirit of prisoners and the nation to which they belong, by inflicting suffering on their bodies, separating them from their families and communities, using humiliating measures to compel subjugation,” Barghouti wrote in a New York Times opinion article.

“In spite of such treatment, we will not surrender to it.”

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## Turkey Extends Post-Coup Emergency State for 3 Months

ANKARA (Dispatches) – Turkey’s cabinet has extended a state of emergency in the country for another three months just one day after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan wins a referendum extending his executive powers.

The state of emergency was initially imposed following a failed coup in the country on July 15. Since then, it has already been extended twice.

The decision for the third extension was made late on Monday, following a meeting of the National Security Council (MGK) chaired by Erdogan.

“The recommendation was considered and the Council of Ministers signed to extend the state of emergency for another three months from Wednesday,” Deputy Prime Minister Numan Kurtulmus.

Kurtulmus stressed that the extension was aimed at

empowering the government to “fight against terrorist groups.” “In this struggle, whatever is necessary will be done,” he added.

The state of emergency has allowed the government to launch a harsh crackdown on those believed to have played a role in the failed coup.

The massive action, which has seen more than 40,000 arrested and over 100,000 discharged from their jobs, has faced increasing international criticism, especially from Europe, where governments believe Ankara has acted beyond the rule of law.

The state of emergency was to end on April 19 and its extension comes one day after the country voted for constitutional changes which vastly boosted Erdogan’s powers.

The reforms will change Turkey’s parliamentary system into a

presidential one; the office of the prime minister will be abolished; the president will appoint the cabinet and an undefined number of vice-presidents, and will be able to select and remove senior civil servants without parliamentary approval.

The changes would also potentially keep Erdogan in power until 2029. He has already been there since 2003.

U.S. President Donald Trump called his Turkish counterpart to congratulate him on victory in a referendum that boosts his power and plays a key role in the future of the country and the rest of the region.

He made the call Monday after the ‘Yes’ campaign won over 51 percent of the votes during Sunday’s referendum, while the ‘No’ campaign gained nearly 49 percent.