

University Hospital, Damascus: Meeting Victims of Western-backed Mortar and Rocket Terrorism

By Eva Bartlett 4 March 2015

From February 24-26, 2015, I joined a US delegation of 6 anti-war activists—including, notably, former Attorney General, Ramsey Clark, as well as former US Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney and long-time anti-war advocate Sara Flounders, of the [International Action Center](#)—in a solidarity visit to Damascus.

During our two days, we met with a number of important Syrian voices, including: Dr. Bouthaina Shaaban, Political & Media Advisor to President al-Assad; Ministers of Information and Justice; Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs; President of the (independent) BAR association; Syria’s [Grand Mufti, Sheikh Ahmad Badreddin Hassoun](#), and leaders within the PFLP based in Syria.

However, on the human level, one important visit was that of the tour of Damascus’ largest hospital, University Hospital, where victims of terrorist rocket and mortar attacks were being treated. Following is an account of what we saw and heard. At the end, I’ve included notes from my June 2014 article, [The Terrorism We Support in Syria: A First-hand Account of the Use of Mortars against Civilians](#)

University Hospital: A young doctor—who I will call “Rana” as I didn’t get her name—tours our delegation through the University Hospital’s 15 bed ICU, explaining the different cases as we go. “We receive here only civilians, civilians who have suffered some sort of shrapnel or bombing injury and who need intensive care after surgery. They come from the suburbs of Damascus, mostly from up to 10 kms away. Patients stay here from 6 days up to a month.”

Delegate’s Question: “So that means there are explosions taking place that close to this location.”

Answer: “Yes.”

Me: “Do they tend to be mortars, from Douma or somewhere?”

Older Doctor: “Ok. Exactly!”

Rana speaks of 4 of the injured patients. “One of them was discharged today, and three of them are still here in the intensive care. Three of them are siblings,” she repeats. They suffer different shrapnel injuries, after a mortar hit near their house four days prior, a doctor, Ali, explains to me. At the bed of the first injured child, the female doctor explains, “Both her legs and her hands are injured. There is a fragment inside her brain. She had surgery, and now she is in the intensive care.”

Fourteen year old girl from Arihah, Idlib, critical condition after hit by mortar shrapnel.





Shrapnel in her brain, “She could be dead any minute.”

“Her situation is very dangerous,” an older nurse says. “She could be dead any minute,” Rana says. “This is her mother,” she gestures to a young woman who wears the face of so many Palestinian mothers I’ve seen before. “Three of her children were injured.”

Me: “Where did the bomb come from?”

Ali: “From Douma.” He doesn’t bother to add that the only armed persons who could have fired this are the terrorists who have been raining mortars and rockets from Douma all around, including on Damascus.

Me: “Mortar or...?”

Ali: “Mortar.”

I walk up to the next bed and hear Rana say, “Her baby, the infant, is safe.” An older nurse tells me the girl is 18 years old, five months pregnant, arrived at the hospital 4 days ago, and has mortar shrapnel in her brain. It was approximately two hours before they reached a hospital, the female doctor said. “We received them and gave them emergency. Intensive,” Rana says.



In another bed, the third child (a three year old)’s head is wrapped in bandaging. Her case is critical, Ali tells me. She lies still, her only movement from the mechanical ventilator.

A 15 year old girl from al-Wafideen Camp, near Adra, (roughly 15 km NE of Damascus) lies with a bandaged head, her other injuries covered by a blanket. “She has shrapnel in her legs, chest and brain,” an older doctor explains. Her mother is in another bed.

“They live in Ghouta, but fled to al-Wafideen, and still got hit by explosives. ... They fled from their

home to a safer area, and this is what happened..,” the doctor says.

Me: “Was she injured by mortar or rocket fire?”

Doctor: “Rocket fire.”

Me: “From where?”

Doctor: “From Douma.”

In another room, a fourteen year old girl lies awake, her remaining eye open, the other ruined by shrapnel. Both legs are in casts, broken, and one hand is bandaged. I’m told she arrived 3 days prior, from Arihah, Idlib countryside, injured by a mortar blast. Her situation is critical, the female doctor says. Idlib is some hours to the north; the girl has been brought to Damascus because her case is so severe.

Another bed holds a 16 year old boy, part of his right leg amputated, shrapnel in his left. Another mortar injury. He’s from ad-Dumayr, roughly 30 km NE of Damascus, with Douma in between.

The last injured boy I see is another teen, one leg bandaged up to his pelvis, the other leg missing from that point, and bandaging over his stomach. He was attacked in al-Kiswah, roughly 20 km east of Damascus.

The word “injury” never suffices these sorts of life-altering mutilations.

“What you just saw was only a minor example of the many patients we’ve been receiving,” says Ali. “Some weeks ago, hundreds of rockets were fired on Damascus. Can you imagine the sound of 20 rockets at once. Something crazy.”

In another room, outside of the ICU, Ali points to a teen being drip-fed by an IV. He’s had a colostomy and will need this drip-feed for a month, Ali estimates, noting the cost is pricey: around \$100/bag, and the teen will need at least one/day. Ali repeats what the doctors have said (and what most Syrians I’ve met have told me): his care and medicines are free, his family doesn’t have to pay.

As Ramsey Clark said earlier in the hospital visit, “That’s the way it ought to be.”

The elevator used by ambulances serving the hospital, reeks of stale blood. “No matter how much we wash it, we can’t get rid of the stench,” the older doctor tells me.

In a downstairs office, the doctors explain more about the hospital. It had 860 beds, 40 more were added 4 years ago, to cope with the growing emergency cases. A university hospital, there are 500 residents, and 210 specialists. It gets an average of 500 emergency patients daily, not all of whom are related to terror attacks.



While the hospital treats all that come for care, nonetheless—similar to Gaza, whose medical sector is in a far more (siege-and-bombing-manufactured) dire state—the hospitals around Syria lack certain medicines and machinery due to the long-suffered, criminal sanctions on Syria.

Rana notes, “We have so many difficulties, to ensure that we have antibiotics, specialized medicines, maintenance of the equipment, its essential for the patients. Because of the sanctions, many parts are not available, we have difficulties obtaining them. We’ve substituted for those medicines missing, but they are not the same quality.”

[On the criminal sanctions on Syria, see <http://endthesanctions.com/>]

ON MORTARS AND PRIOR ATTACKS:

In June 2014, on Election Day, the West's terrorists fired on polling stations around Syria, as well as targeting residential and commercial areas, in their bid to terrorize Syrians from voting. They failed, but nonetheless killed and maimed many innocent Syrians in the process. I wrote about these mortars and the Election Day attacks [[The Terrorism We Support in Syria: A First-hand Account of the Use of Mortars against Civilians](#)]. Following are excerpts:

"In the three month period of April, May and June 2014, terrorist-insurgents fired 994 mortars on Damascus and environs, 426 of which were fired in June. On June 3, Election Day in Syria, the terrorist-insurgents fired 151 shells on Damascus, killing 5 and maiming 33 Syrians..."

Press TV [updated](#): "...Syria's official news agency SANA reported on Saturday that at least 39 people had lost their lives in the mortar attack on the election campaign rally in Syria's southern city of Dara'a late on Thursday. According to the report, some 205 people were also wounded in the attack, while 14 of the injured are in critical condition."

...On May 31, Press TV [reported](#): "Twenty people have been killed in mortar attacks carried out by foreign-backed militants on Syria's northwestern city of Aleppo. The militants fired 40 mortar shells on several neighborhoods of the flashpoint city, destroying many buildings."

...At the time (April & June 2014), Damascus was being intensely shelled by mortars, frequently in my vicinity, including just behind the hotel housing the Peace Delegation which I accompanied for the first week. This attack killed three civilians and one Syrian soldier. We saw some of the [60 plus children injured in the April 15 shelling](#) of a school, not an isolated occasion, an attack which also killed one child. Mortars rained down at close-proximity on many occasions in different areas of the Old City where I had then found lodging.

[Prior to](#) and since then, other residential, civilian areas I've become familiar with have been incessantly-targeted... and none of those areas can be considered targets for a "revolution"—in other words, neither governmental nor military sites. The terrorists are intentionally targeting high-density civilian areas, and often take videos of themselves manufacturing, preparing and firing the mortar shells.

Bab Touma (Thomas Gate), Bab Sharqi (East Gate), and the Shagour area of the Old City have all been repeatedly-targeted, as have the commercial Shaalan district—particularly near the Dar al-Salaam school—and other areas of Damascus and environs, including Abasyeen, Dweilaa, Baramkeh, Jaramana, Yarmouk, and Mazzeh. These are areas housing shops, restaurants, homes, schools, hospitals and clinics, hotels, parks...and thus the victims are Syrian civilians, including children.

...[One evening, I sat talking with a restaurant-owner](#) near Bab Sharqi in the Old City. Abu Shadi, the restaurant owner, lamented the lack of tourists, due to the war on Syria, and spoke of his own close encounter with mortars. As we spoke, mortars were fired on different areas of the Old City, one of which roughly 50 metres from where we sat [[LISTEN HERE](#)].

...The genial hotel owner [spoke one day](#) about a friend of his killed a few days prior. 'My friend was martyred by a mortar three days ago. He was a pharmacist...He was at Bab Touma at the time, walking on the street, and a mortar fell there. They want to burn Syria from within, want to leave these factions fighting each until Syria is burned down and Syria is bled-out.'

A university student I spoke with on a crowded Old City bus [one morning commented](#) on the formerly-popular market area, Midan, as the bus passed by. ‘People are afraid to come here now, because its so close to Yarmouk. Midan is safe, but people think that the terrorists in Yarmouk will fire mortars here. I used to go to Yarmouk all the time, but now, no way.’

Following an [April 21 mortar attack](#) on Bab Touma, which killed 2 and maimed 23, I [spoke with shop employees](#) who had been present at the time of the attack. An employee in a shoe shop said: ‘It was just after 3 pm, the area was packed with people. It happens a lot, a lot, a lot, ...all the time. Shrapnel flew everywhere, little bits and pieces. In the last two weeks, around ten mortars have landed in this area. This isn’t a revolution. They’ve come from outside. Do you know how we were living? We had security, work... but, sorry, now...?’ In a clothing shop, an employee present at the time said: “‘We were inside, heard the explosion, went outside and saw the dead lying on the ground. We get these mortars all the time...’

...according to the NDF soldier, it is the home-made mortars which are the dirtiest. ‘They are shells, made in local workshops. Inside them they pack broken glass, nails, and anything that will hurt whoever is hit by the debris. They put explosives in the centre of these shards. Then they add the tail end and explosives to propel the mortar. When the mortar explodes, the metal container is destroyed and becomes shrapnel pieces which, along with the glass and nails, causes more extensive injuries.

The US mortars are stronger, intended for infantry. But the terrorists are using them as well. They won’t cause much damage to buildings, but they can maim and kill a lot of people. The terrorists can’t enter the city, so they’re trying to stop daily life by firing mortars on the city. They’ve been very open about their reasons for firing mortars on Damascus and other areas: they are punishing the Syrians who do not support their ‘revolution’. They say if you are living in an area controlled by the army and government of Syria, so you are against the ‘revolution’ and they are going to attack you, they say that it is halal (permitted by Islam) to kill you. Mortars are routinely fired from Jobar, about 1.5 km from here (central Damascus). The main group there is the Nusra Front, though there are also some members of so-called Free Syrian Army (FSA). Some of the armed men were trying a while ago to surrender to the government, but when they would try, they’d get a sniper’s bullet to the head from the other terrorists. There are so many civilians not involved in these attacks, so the army can’t fully attack Jobar with heavy weapons.’...”

*** Since then, Jobar has been largely liberated, but with terrorists in Douma, just east of Damascus, mortar and rocket attacks continue.

The “Army of Islam’s” leader, Saudi-asset Zahran Alloush, had (until Twitter finally blocked him) tweeted his threats to bombard Damascus with rockets and mortars, and bragged about such terrorist acts after the fact. On Feb 7 he tweeted: “Hundreds of rockets pound regime positions in Damascus.” On Jan 26 he tweeted: “We hit the regime in Damascus with 100 rockets...”

More recently, on Feb 12 [Al Akhbar reported on](#) an Al Jazeera interview with Alloush, citing him as threatening “that his future attacks will be carried out in the form of ‘600 to 1,000 rockets and mortar shells in a single hit...’” The man who corporate media like the BBC and Al Jazeera have interviewed and attempted to humanize (much like they did with the “moderate” [organ-eating al-Farouq Brigade “Abu Sakkar,”](#)) did not target Syrian government positions, he targeted residential and commercial areas in Damascus and its countryside.

The victims in University Hospital the day we visited—a mere fraction of the endless injured and martyred Syrians by such terrorist attacks not only in Damascus and environs, but also in Latakia, Aleppo and elsewhere in Syria—are testimony to this terrorism.

The average reader might question why the MSM hasn't reported on these victims, this terrorism. The sad reality is that the corporate and Gulf media serve the US-NATO-Zionist-Gulf-Turkish terror agenda.

Which is why these mortar and rocket victims' stories need to be seen, heard and shared.



<https://ingaza.wordpress.com/2015/03/03/university-hospital-damascus-meeting-victims-of-western-backed-mortar-and-rocket-terrorism/>