

# Besieged Raqqa Face Starvation



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## Contents

|   |          |
|---|----------|
| <b>1 Introduction.....</b>                          | <b>1</b> |
| <b>2 Besieging Raqqa and Liberation Battle.....</b> | <b>1</b> |
| <b>3 Humanitarian Situation.....</b>                | <b>2</b> |

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Siege of Raqqa in the fourth month, continuation of massacres and upcoming starvation

## 1 Introduction

Daesh has been in control of most of the province of Al-Raqqa since January 2014. They turned the city of Al-Raqqa into a center from which they launched their military operations against other areas in Syria. It was the so-called capital of its terror and evil.

In January 2017, the SDF, being backed by the USA-led coalition, launched the battle to liberate Al-Raqqa. They indicated that their aim was to liberate the city from the extremist organization. It was not expected that the battle would be long and it would cause large-scale destruction and displacement of civilians, as well as massive civilian casualties, apart from those who have gone missing, or suffered traumas and life-threatening injuries. The dream of liberating Al-Raqqa has been transformed into a nightmare chasing the locals inside and outside the city, mainly those living in the besieged areas of the city.

Both, the SDF and the International Coalition, sought to isolate and besiege the city after capturing the surrounding areas from the organization. They also left some open passageways for Daesh to retreat from the city towards Deir Ezzor. The attacking forces managed to gain control over key areas before reaching the city, including Al-Tabqah, Al-Karamah, Al-Mansura as well as other areas in northern Al-Raqqa, before reaching the vicinity of the city which marked the beginning of the chapters of the real tragedy.

## 2 Besieging Raqqa and Liberation Battle

In the beginning, the coalition airstrikes targeted strategic Daesh positions because they thought (based on intelligence delivered to them by some Daesh defectors) that they were safe havens for its high-ranking commanders and a place consisting of its operation rooms, headquarters and arms depots. However, the strikes were not that effective and did not impact the military capabilities of the organization since it was already prepared for them. Daesh had already evacuated its headquarters and centers and relocated them to other areas before the beginning of the strikes. Therefore, they succeeded in avoiding the first attack. In addition, most of the intelligence data were inaccurate, which led to the killing of many civilians because the coordinates were detected based on unsophisticated tools and incompetent people.

The organization tried to lure the attacking forces into urban warfare which it masters, bearing in mind that it is familiar with the areas they are fighting in contrary to the enemy. It succeeded in doing so, which led the SDF to sustain a heavy toll after they were successfully surrounded and attacked by the organization in the Mansur and the Muaataz streets during the beginning of the battles. After that, the course of the battles started to take another level after the coalition decided to use carpet-bombing strategy. Hence, they began indiscriminately and violating striking and shelling the city without taking the civilians inside it into account. The proof for this is that all densely-populated areas were violently targeted. Many civilians were killed in the Badu neighborhood, the Amassi, the Firdawss and the Baydae Park.

In addition, hospitals, schools, mosques, ovens, and water wells, which were the lifeblood of the remaining civilians after water and electricity were cut off in the besieged city due to the destruction of its infrastructure, were targeted and destroyed.

Daesh managed to continue fighting because they were well-prepared before the beginning of the battle. It also managed to establish a tunnel network and hideouts so that it continues fighting for several months. On the practical level, the organization does not care about the current destruction or the number of civilian casualties since its main priority is to inflict as much losses as it can on the attacking forces and to stay firm at the frontlines for the possible longest period.

### 3 Humanitarian Situation

The worst catastrophic outcome of the battles of Al-Raqqa is the huge number of civilian casualties due to the in-discriminatory artillery shelling and airstrikes. Daesh is also deliberately targeting civilians trying to flee from the city for they are a priority for Daesh snipers who are stationed everywhere and do not distinguish between the adult and the minor.

The documentation of the civilian casualties in the besieged city is very difficult, and all the current statistics remain inaccurate since it is difficult to communicate with the trapped civilians. The real number could surpass what it has been documented.

The Raqqa24 media outlet put the death toll at more than 5000 civilians since the beginning of the Raqqa campaign, in addition to more than 4000 missing civilians who are believed to be under the rubble of collapsed buildings, as well as the huge number of disabled civilians because of the fragments of strikes and shells and the lack of medical supplies, which are restricted to Daesh fighters only.

The Raqqa24 documented the death of 1316 civilians, including 262 children and 229 women. 856 of them were killed in airstrikes by the coalition, 201 were killed by SDF arbitrary artillery shelling while 66 others were killed in the explosion of Daesh landmines. Daesh also executed 43 persons in the same period for different charges, including cooperation with the

coalition or attempting to flee from the city. The cause of the death of 150 civilians remains unknown.

The hospitals of the city of Al-Raqqa are unable to provide medical treatment for the wounded due to the absence of medical supplies, including antibiotics, because of the pressure put upon them and also because of the siege. Another cause is the fact that Daesh fighters are treated as a priority over the injured civilians, and there is a lack of medical staff. After the arbitrary airstrikes intensified against the city, most medical points were closed and limited their services to Daesh fighters only. At the current time, civilians are attempting to treat their wounded in their houses. The fragments that cut off the blood vessels of the wounded have led to the death of many civilians so far, according to a doctor in Raqqa who spoke to the Raqqa24 team.

Moreover, the transportation of the wounded from the besieged city is difficult and impossible for most of the time because of the unavailability of ambulances. The local civilians are using motorcycles, if available, to transport their wounded to distant areas since fuel is unavailable and very expensive when available. The trapped civilians are burying their dead in public and private parks such as the Panorama park south of the city and the Great Mosque park because they cannot go to the cemetery of the city.

A doctor confirmed to the Raqqa24 that the cases of amputation in the besieged Raqqa were carried out using primitive tools without sterilization and anesthesia. 4 cases of muscle relaxant were recorded in the besieged Raqqa and are suspected of being polio cases. Moreover, more diseases have spread among civilians and they have not been analyzed yet.

Concerning medical supplies, they are now unavailable in the besieged city. Food is also unfound. Therefore, civilians are relying on the seeds they previously stored, though they have started to run out of them, meaning that a famine can occur in the city sooner or later, bearing in

mind that around 5000 to 10000 are believed to be living in the besieged neighborhoods.

Since March 2017, bread has been scarce. Its price became 6 times the average price. Since May, the ovens have closed due to airstrikes and the lack of flour or the increase of its price.

The suffering of civilians did not stop here since waste has spread everywhere in the city after the cleaning staff stopped working due to air raids and the siege, which led to the appearance of bad smells and rodents.

Electricity and water supplies have been cut off in Al-Raqqa for around four months. The besieged civilians are burning plastic materials and some furniture to heat and sterilize the water

they extract from wells. But, the coalition have rendered more than 13 wells in Al-Raqqa unusable. Many civilians were also killed as they were gathering nearby them. An example for this was the targeting of a gathering of civilians by the coalition near a water well in the Badu neighborhood, which resulted in the death of 13 of them.

In a quick view on the infrastructure of the city (based on testimonies by local families, which were confirmed by the Raqqa24 team) the city has become unlivable due to the large-scale amount of destruction of the buildings. In addition, all hospitals as well as governmental buildings have been destroyed. More than 90 percent of the schools and more than 29 have been completely destroyed.

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