

Schnellrecherche der SFH-Länderanalyse vom 5. Juli 2017 zu Syrien: Situation in Aleppo

Fragen an die SFH-Länderanalyse:

- Wie ist die Situation in Aleppo nach der Eroberung durch das syrische Regime Armees im Dezember 2016?
- Gibt es Informationen zur Sicherheitssituation in Aleppo?

Die Informationen beruhen auf einer zeitlich begrenzten Recherche (Schnellrecherche) in öffentlich zugänglichen Dokumenten, die uns derzeit zur Verfügung stehen, sowie auf den Informationen sachkundiger Kontaktpersonen.

1 Situation in Aleppo

Schlecht dokumentierte Menschenrechtslage. Aufgrund der Einschränkungen für Medien, dem Verbot von unabhängigen Untersuchungen zur Menschenrechtslage und der politisch motivierten Berichterstattung und Propaganda ist das Ausmass der Menschenrechtsverletzungen seit der Eroberung von Aleppo durch das syrische Regime unklar (IRIN, Juni 2017; IRIN, April 2017).

Aleppo, ein urbanes Schlachtfeld. Aleppo war über tausend Jahre ein wirtschaftliches und kulturelles Zentrum. Heute sind das historische Zentrum und das intellektuelle, kulturelle und wirtschaftliche Leben in Aleppo zerstört (IRIN, April 2017). Aleppo war von Juli 2012 bis Dezember 2016 gespalten: Quartiere im Osten der Stadt wurden von verschiedenen Fraktionen der Opposition überwacht, Gebiete im Westen der Stadt wurden vom syrischen Regime kontrolliert. Während dieser Jahre kam es in den Wohngebieten Aleppos fast täglich zu intensiven Kämpfen mit schweren Waffen. Dramatische Bilder aus Aleppo gingen immer wieder um die Welt. Humanitäre Organisationen hatten kaum Zugang zur Not leidenden zum Teil eingeschlossenen Bevölkerung und machten immer wieder auf die schlimme Lage der Bevölkerung aufmerksam. Das IKRK nennt Aleppo das schlimmste urbane Schlachtfeld der jüngeren Vergangenheit (IKRK, Juni 2017). In den Medien wird die Situation in Aleppo mit derjenigen in Berlin, Coventry oder Dresden nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg verglichen (*World News*, Juni 2017, *New York Review of Books*, Mai 2017).

Verstösse gegen das humanitäre Völkerrecht. Internationale Organisationen machten auf die immer häufiger werdenden gezielten Anschläge durch das syrische Regime und dessen Verbündete auf medizinische Einrichtungen, Schulen und Wohnquartier in Aleppo aufmerksam. Essentielle Infrastruktur wie Spitäler, Wasserversorgung, Stromversorgung und Schulen wurden zerstört. Hierbei handelt es sich um Verstösse gegen das humanitäre Völkerrecht (IKRK, Juni 2017).

Zerstörung der Infrastruktur. Nach jahrelangen Bombardierungen durch das syrische Regime und dessen Verbündete sowie den Machtkämpfen innerhalb der bewaffneten oppositionellen Gruppen sind weite Teile der Wohngebiete im Osten Aleppos zerstört. 70 bis 80 Prozent der zerstörten Infrastruktur liegt im Osten Aleppos (IRIN,

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April 2017). Gemäss dem IKRK gibt es keine Gebiete in Aleppo, die nicht von Zerstörung betroffen sind (IKRK, Juni 2017).

Die medizinische Versorgung ist sehr schlecht. Viele Gesundheitseinrichtungen sind zerstört oder durch den Mangel an sauberem Wasser und Strom stark beeinträchtigt. Problematisch sind auch die lokal hergestellten Medikamente, deren Qualität nicht mehr kontrolliert wird, was bereits zu vielen Komplikationen geführt hat. Erschwerend kommt hinzu, dass viele Ärzte die Stadt verlassen haben (*Syrischer Journalist*, 27. und 28. Juni 2017).

Die Fabriken und die wirtschaftlichen Ressourcen Aleppos sind zerstört (*New York Times*, Mai 2017). Es wird Jahre dauern, bis nur die grundlegendste Infrastruktur wieder aufgebaut ist (*World News*, Juni 2017).

Zerstörung der sozialen Strukturen. Auch wenn der Westen Aleppos weniger von der physischen Zerstörung betroffen ist, ist auch dort das ehemalige soziale Gefüge zerstört (*The New York Review of Books*, Mai 2017). Während der letzten Jahre mussten alle, die nicht aus Aleppo geflohen sind, sich mit einem Netz verschiedenster Milizen oder Armeeeinheiten arrangieren. Nur so konnte das Überleben gesichert werden. Andauernd eroberten und kontrollierten wechselnde Milizen bestimmte Wohngebiete. Die Bevölkerung konnte nie sicher sein, wem sie vertrauen soll (*New York Times*, Mai 2017).

Schwierige Lebensbedingungen. Viele der 250'000 registrierten Rückkehrerinnen und Rückkehrer sind auf humanitäre Hilfe angewiesen (IRIN, Juni 2017). Ein *UN-Mitarbeiter* erklärte am 29. Juni 2017 gegenüber der SFH, dass, auch wenn die Quartiere im Westen Aleppos weniger von der physischen Zerstörung betroffen sind, tausende intern Vertriebener und lokale Einwohner unter schwierigsten Bedingungen leben und von humanitärer Hilfe abhängig sind (*UN-Mitarbeiter*, Juni 2017). Die Lebenskosten in Aleppo sind gemäss den Angaben eines *syrischen Journalisten* gegenüber der SFH vom 27. und 28. Juni 2017 sehr hoch. Er schätzt, dass eine Person je nach gesundheitlichem Zustand zwischen 100 und 200 US-Dollar pro Monat braucht. Ein guter Lohn beim syrischen Regime beträgt im Vergleich dazu zwischen 80 und 100 US-Dollar (*Syrischer Journalist*, 27. und 28. Juni 2017). Wasser und Elektrizität müssen in der ganzen Stadt gekauft und selbst bezahlt werden. Gemäss dem syrischen Journalisten gibt es pro Tag höchstens eine Stunde fliessendes Wasser und Elektrizität. Die Generatoren gehören oft Milizionären (*The Guardian*, März 2017; *Syrischer Journalist*, 27. und 28. Juni 2017). Wie bereits oben beschrieben, ist die medizinische Versorgung sehr schlecht.

2 Sicherheitssituation in Aleppo

Anschläge, Explosionen von Minen und nicht detoniertes Kampfmateriell. Es kommt weiterhin zu willkürlichen Anschlägen verschiedener Akteure innerhalb Aleppos. Am 23. März 2017 starben fünf Kinder bei einem Granatenangriff. Im Februar und März verübte die islamistische Gruppe *Abu Amara Battalion* zwei Bombenanschläge. Auch wenn es seltener zu kriegerischen Auseinandersetzungen kommt, wurden allein im März 2017 gemäss UNOCHA 37 Personen durch Minen, nicht detoniertes Kampfmateriell und Blindgänger verletzt, 21 Personen kamen dabei ums Leben.

UNOCHA äussert sich besorgt, dass immer noch Waffen wie zum Beispiel Granaten, willkürlich in dicht besiedelten Gebieten eingesetzt werden (UNOCHA, März 2017, IRIN, Juni 2017).

Kriminalität und Gewalt durch Milizen. Nach der Eroberung von Ost-Aleppo durch die syrische Armee mit der Unterstützung von Milizen wurden viele Armee-Einheiten aus Aleppo abgezogen. Seither haben die Milizen in der ganzen Stadt freie Hand zum Plündern, Stehlen und Morden. Viele der verschiedenen Milizen, Shabbiha, werden von Mitgliedern der Geheimdienste oder von mächtigen Geschäftsleuten unterstützt. Einige sind wie private Sicherheitsdienste organisiert, bei andern handelt es sich um paramilitärische Brigaden. Die Sicherheitslage hat sich verschlechtert, und Gewalt und Kriminalität von Seiten der Milizen haben zugenommen. Oppositionelle wie auch Unterstützer des syrischen Regimes sind von der Kriminalität betroffen, Gewalt und Kriminalität herrschen in ganz Aleppo vor. Die syrische Regierung versucht seit dem 15. Juni 2017, als ein kleiner Junge von einem Milizionär grundlos erschossen wurde, die Milizen wieder unter ihre Kontrolle zu bringen. Gemäss den Aussagen eines Pro-Regime Geschäftsmannes sollen hunderte verhaftet worden sein. Andere Beobachter gehen jedoch davon aus, dass das syrische Regime insgeheim die Plünderungen zulässt, um auf diese Weise die Milizen, auf welche die Regierung angewiesen ist, zu entlohnen (IRIN, Juni, 2017; *New York Times*, Mai 2017; *Syrischer Journalist*, Juni 2017).

Verhaftungen von Oppositionellen. Unterstützer der Opposition riskieren verhaftet zu werden. Das von IRIN (Juni 2017) zitierte *Syrian Network for Human Rights* hat zwischen Januar und Juni 2017 419 Verhaftungen dokumentiert, darunter die Verhaftung von 21 Frauen und 14 Kindern (gemäss der gleichen Quelle sollen 891 Zivilpersonen verhaftet worden sein, IRIN, April 2017). Bei den meisten Verhafteten handelt es sich um junge Männer, die sich dem Militärdienst entzogen haben.

«Escorting». Mit dem sogenannten «Escorting» verdienen Milizionäre Unsummen. Dabei zwingen sie Händler, für eine «sichere Eskorte» von einem Checkpoint zum nächsten Geld zu bezahlen. Fahrer berichten, dass sie pro Eskorte bis zu 200'000 Syrische Pfund (400 US-Dollar) bezahlen mussten. Dies treibt die bereits hohen Preise von Alltagsgütern zusätzlich in die Höhe (IRIN, Juni 2017).

IRIN, 22. Juni 2017:

«This time, however, the killing took place in an Aleppo entirely under the control of al-Assad's government. After a long and brutal campaign forced the last rebels out of the city in December 2016, the regime has struggled to restore life to bombed-out eastern neighbourhoods. The militia crackdown now underway will be a major test of the Syrian president's ability to restore governance to areas retaken from insurgents, not just in Aleppo, but across the country.»

Life in a broken city

Life is not easy in Aleppo. Opposition supporters are most at risk, with al-Assad's government persecuting even those who voice criticism peacefully or in a private setting. But the extent of human rights abuses in Aleppo is hard to gauge,

given state restrictions on media and visiting journalists, a ban on independent human rights research, and the politicised nature of claims from all sides.

Fadel Abdul-Ghany, chairman of the exile-based, opposition-aligned Syrian Network for Human Rights, told IRIN last week that his group has documented 419 arrests in the city during 2017. Most of these were young men wanted for draft-dodging rather than political offenses, but the list also includes 21 women and 14 children, and Abdul-Ghany said security officers are known to have gone after the families of some rebels and high-profile activists.

Abdul-Ghany also said his contacts in Aleppo have documented widespread looting by pro-regime militias. Homes and shops linked to opposition supporters in neighbourhoods such as Masaken Hanano, Sakhour, Saliheen, and parts of the Old City are said to have been plundered or burnt down. People in Aleppo are also at risk from sporadic attacks by remnants of the city's defeated insurgency, despite the government's stringent security measures. In February and April, two bombings organised by an Islamist faction known as the Abu Amara Battalions rocked Aleppo. However, such reports have remained rare, especially compared to the furious violence elsewhere in Syria.

However, the city was devastated by years of war, and many of the 250,000 people registered as having returned to eastern Aleppo since the end of last year are in need of "immense support", Linda Tom, a Damascus-based spokesperson for the UN emergency aid coordination body, OCHA, told IRIN by email.

Crime and militia violence

Compounding the difficulty of daily life for residents – no matter whom they support – is crime, which Aleppans seem to view as a major problem. In many cases, it has been linked to pro-government forces. During the fight over Aleppo, the army sought to compensate for its diminishing manpower by raising large numbers of local militias. Some are organised as private security companies, while others are large paramilitary formations like the Jerusalem Brigade, which has roots in Aleppo's Palestinian refugee camps.

Some groups, however, are known to the opposition simply by the derogatory term "shabbiha" and to loyalists as "popular committees". Both words refer to what are in reality the entourages of local strongmen, typically armed and protected by a patron in the intelligence services or by a powerful businessman. During the violence in Aleppo, they performed auxiliary duties and occasionally manned the front lines, but many were also busily engaged in looting and bribe-taking, the incomes of which then filtered upward to their political benefactors.

After the fall of the insurgent enclave in eastern Aleppo, much of the regular army moved out. Some units now man the temporarily calm western frontline against Turkish-backed groups, while others are fighting their way toward the IS strongholds of Raqqa and Deir Ezzor in the east. This seems to have made the security situation deteriorate further, by giving the militias free rein. According to Abdul-Ghany, civilians who have objected to militia groups breaking into homes or

looting stores are known to have been summarily arrested and transferred to government security organs.

This month, a number of crimes linked to pro-Assad militants inflamed local opinion. A reporter at a state television channel was threatened and abused by militiamen, thugs opened fire at a football team, and Talar Vosekian, a well-respected female Syrian-Armenian dentist, was killed in a car accident by a speeding driver who bore signs of militia connections: military fatigues, no number plates. Opposition outlets have reported many more offenses.

But it was the killing of Ahmed Jawish that catalysed Aleppan frustrations: the senseless murder of a young child and the alleged involvement of popular committee members was even reported in the pro-government press – a sign that Damascus had decided it was time to slam down the hammer.

The government cracks down

*On 15 June, both loyalist and opposition sources reported the start of a major crack-down, as State Security and Air Force Intelligence troops began rounding up popular committee members in the Adhamiya, Akramiya, and Seif al-Dawla neighbourhoods. According to one pro-opposition news site, a militia commander called Mohammed Said refused to hand himself over to authorities, leading to a brief battle in which the government prevailed. **The following day, the governor of Aleppo, Brigadier General Hussein Diab, announced that the man suspected of murdering Ahmed Jawish had been detained. “So far, the government arrested hundreds of them,” Fares al-Shehabi, a prominent pro-government businessman and parliamentarian from Aleppo, told IRIN in an online interview. “Many more will be arrested.”***

According to al-Shehabi, those caught up in the state’s dragnet are mostly from the Aleppo countryside and not all are connected to the security forces but “wear the uniform to scare people off”. Some had certainly fought for the loyalist side, but al-Shehabi insisted that many had previously been expelled from larger units for engaging in petty crime. He castigates them as “thieves, thugs, trash”. “Yes, a lot of them are in fact from the countryside,” said Aymenn al-Tamimi, a research fellow with the Middle East Forum who studies pro-government militias. In comments made to IRIN this week, he listed a number of Aleppan clan militias drawn from the rural hinterland south and east of the city, some of which work under Iranian tutelage while others are attached to the Military Intelligence Directorate or another official security force. “I’m not sure how far the countryside origin is a factor here in the tension,” Tamimi added.

Closing down checkpoint extortion

The crackdown does not come entirely out of the blue. Al-Shehabi himself made the news last month for demanding an end to the practice known as “escorting”, or tarfiq in Arabic.

“Escorting” has been a major problem for Aleppo’s businessmen and for the city more generally. Civilian trucks carrying goods or aid to the city must often bring along security escorts, as much to provide actual protection as to clear them for passage through checkpoints.

Over time, this system has morphed into a massive protection racket, with militias forcing traders to pay exorbitant sums for a pro forma escort from one checkpoint to the next, even when there is clearly no risk of an attack. At some checkpoints, drivers have reportedly had to pay “escort fees” of up to 200,000 Syrian pounds, or close to 400 US dollars, which is a tidy sum in Syria. The costs are in the end transferred to customers, pushing prices of basic goods far upwards at a time when most Syrians struggle to cover their living expenses. Al-Shehabi’s campaign reportedly sparked angry counter-reactions from some local militants, but he seems to relish the chance to show off his anti-militia credentials. “I am spearheading this effort and became the number one enemy of these warlords,” he told IRIN.

However, al-Shehabi is not the first or only government supporter to speak out. In February, Prime Minister Emad Khamis’s office released a statement saying “escorts are not compulsory”, adding that “any checkpoint that mandates them must be reported, in order for the competent authorities to take appropriate measures.”

The following month, the Damascus Chamber of Industrialists also called for a ban on the practice, citing it as a major obstacle to Syrian business. In May, the regime’s chief security officer in Aleppo, Lieutenant General Zaid al-Saleh, made a more muscular effort to put an end to checkpoint extortion, decreeing a total ban on the practice for all transports to or from Aleppo. Saleh was acting upon instructions of the National Security Office, which operates directly under the president. According to al-Shehabi, who had been involved in organising the business community’s lobbying efforts, al-Assad himself had by then intervened twice to get the ball rolling. This is typical of how the Syrian regime works. Its tangled web of personal relations and overlapping security institutions are both a reason for its extraordinary resilience and a major obstacle to functioning smoothly.

(...) Previous arrest waves in Aleppo failed to bring militia criminality under control, but loyalist sources in and from the city told IRIN that the current effort seems much more comprehensive. “Nothing is out of control,” al-Shehabi insisted. “After the recent crackdown, the people of Aleppo are happy and safe again.”» Quelle: IRIN, Aleppo militias become major test for Assad, 22. Juni 2017: www.irinnews.org/analysis/2017/06/22/aleppo-militias-become-major-test-assad.

World News, 22. Juni 2017:

*«Last year, government forces liberated Aleppo which is the economic core of Syria. However, years of intense fighting have imposed **extensive damage to the city. Currently, the situation in Aleppo is similar to Berlin after the Second World War, and it will take years to repair the basic infrastructure.**» Quelle: World News, Syria’s Endgame Dilemma after DAESH, 22. Juni 2017: <https://intpolicydigest.org/2017/06/22/syria-s-endgame-dilemma-daesh/>.*

New York Times, 24. Mai 2017:

(...) In the eastern Aleppo streets beyond Abu Sami’s house, little has changed since the December morning when he rediscovered his ruined city. A narrow alley leads to an open area where a “hell cannon” still sits, the homemade howitzer used by rebels to fire on government-controlled western Aleppo. Beyond it, there are buildings with

pancaked roofs, evidence of Russian and Syrian bombs. There are piles of rubble so high that entire streets remain impassable. Throughout the former rebel zone that once proudly called itself “free Aleppo,” **there are hospitals and schools and houses — it goes on for miles — that have been reduced to uneven heaps of stone and broken concrete**, where the faint smell of buried corpses still lingers. In the United States, the drawn-out siege of Aleppo — where the Syrian regime and its Russian allies repeatedly bombed hospitals and civilian areas — **was widely deplored as a war crime comparable to the worst massacres of the Bosnian war during the 1990s.** (...)

By then, eastern Aleppo had become a rebel stronghold. In early 2013, elections for provincial councils took place, giving the rebels a civilian veneer. But the councils, initially funded by the Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, were soon under pressure from the Nusra Front, the Syrian Qaeda affiliate, and other hardline groups. Later, ISIS forces captured parts of the city and forced residents to live by their rigid code. **In theory, Aleppo was an embattled showplace for the Syrian revolution’s aspirations. In fact, most civilians were dependent on a patchwork of armed rebel factions for food and protection. The constant pressure of war left almost no room for a real economy, and many of the city’s factories had been repurposed by the rebels as military bases.**

Now Aleppo’s great economic engine lies in ruins. (...) Another man described receiving a visit at his home in government-controlled Aleppo from two ISIS members, who calmly blackmailed him and went on their way, unhurried. **The city had changed hands so many times that no one could be fully confident whose eyes would be watching them.** (...) Just before I arrived in Aleppo in March, a high-ranking Republican Guard commander in the city issued a public order declaring a crackdown on “acts of looting, robbery and assaults on public property and on the freedoms of citizens and their private property.” **The order was a belated recognition of what had been going on for months: an orgy of looting by the various paramilitary groups that work alongside the Syrian Army, and even by elements of the army itself.** I heard complaints about this everywhere I went. Looting has become so common that it has generated a new word: ta’feesh, to steal furniture. One reporter for the regime-friendly TV channel Al Mayadeen said in a November interview that **“this systematic looting has exceeded all limits to include murder as well as stealing and looting.”** He went on to describe a “rigorously organized” process in which the paramilitary groups followed the Syrian Army and pillaged at will, sometimes **“dragging homeowners from their houses and robbing the houses right in front of their eyes.”** Another common tactic, he said, was to pour gasoline on walls and set a fire **“until the tiles on the floors and walls expand due to the heat. Then they put out the fire, remove the tiles and resell them.”** (...)

Publicly, the Syrian state deplores these crimes, but privately it seems to condone them as a form of compensation for the paramilitary groups, whose support Assad needs to supplement his decimated army. (The rebels do it, too, and sometimes offer an Islamic justification: ghana’im al-harb, the spoils of war.) Only when the looting starts to spin out of control, as it did in Aleppo in January and February, is there a crackdown. But such systematized thievery has become entrenched in an econ-

omy that is more corrupt than ever. **Regime-allied armed groups often set up checkpoints and extort taxes from farmers and businessmen, making it that much harder to earn a living.** “You pay through the nose to transport anything anywhere,” I was told by a man who manufactures plastics and has seen most of his profit margin disappear. “Bashar can’t do anything about this. He is in survival mode.” **Meanwhile, war profiteers (tujjar al-harb — another phrase you hear a lot in Syria nowadays) have become well-known figures.** I was amazed to see new, lavish-looking restaurants in Damascus; some of them belong to men who are said to have grown rich from crime. Members of the old Damascus business elite wince when they describe the clientele in these places. One friend told me, “You see a guy in a business suit in a fancy bar talking to a thuggish-looking guy in fatigues, and you understand the conversation without hearing anything.” Some of these men are also widely said to sell oil to rebel groups for huge profits. (...)» Quelle: New York Times, Aleppo After the Fall, 24. Mai 2017: www.nytimes.com/2017/05/24/magazine/aleppo-after-the-fall.html.

The New York Review of Books, 25. Mai 2017:

«As of January, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had registered nearly five million Syrian refugees, in addition to the six million displaced within the country. The demolished neighborhoods of eastern Aleppo make this brutally clear. They contained more than half of Aleppo’s population, until opposition fighters began seizing the area in 2012. Although measures of population movement are guesses at best, international aid agencies report that at least **50,000 eastern Aleppines fled to the western part of the city to avoid shelling by the regime or chaotic jihadist rule.** Thousands more made their way to the government-controlled, war-free coastal cities of Latakia and Tartous, to Lebanon, or to Turkey, which offered visa-free entry, work permits, and, for many months in 2015, a blind eye to any who dared the perilous sea route to Europe.

In December 2016 the Syrian army, with Russian support, conquered the last insurgent strongholds in Aleppo’s east. UNHCR officials believe that about 36,000 people, rebels and their families, departed by bus under Russian protection for the opposition redoubt in Idlib province. **What they left behind conjures memories of Dresden, Coventry, and Tokyo in the aftermath of World War II. The multiple forms of destruction testify to the ingenuity of the world’s arms factories. Bombs have transformed Aleppo into an Escher-like vision of six-foot-thick concrete slabs twisted into braids; five-story apartment buildings compressed into piles ten feet high; and collapsed façades of entire streets exposing rooms with ceiling fans eerily intact and revolving in the wind. (...) Western Aleppo, which remained under government control throughout the war, has suffered less than the eastern side and the sprawling souks near the ancient citadel, a measure of the relative strengths of state and opposition forces.** Each wreaks havoc within the limits of its firepower. Jihadist mortars have demolished some westside apartments, but not entire buildings. Bullet scars are a common sight west of the former front, and the venerable Baron Hotel has lost all its windows and part of its roof. **In areas where the jihadists penetrated for short times, churches no longer exist, and government buildings have been gutted and robbed. Yet on the surface, life in the western half of the city appears to go on much as it did before the war.**

But on both sides of Aleppo, there has been extensive damage to the city's social fabric. As we were sitting in a busy westside restaurant, a representative of the Armenian patriarch in Aleppo told me that of the city's pre-war Armenian population of 45,000, only a third—15,000—remained. "Those in Lebanon may return," he said. "From Montreal, no." The Armenians were Aleppo's largest Christian community. Their decline portends the disappearance of the rest—and the waning of an essential part of the city's cosmopolitan character. Protestant pastor Reverend Ibrahim Nseir said that his Presbyterian congregation was down to fifty families from five hundred before the war. His church continues to administer two schools, where, he says, "99.9 percent of our students are Muslim." (I know many Muslim families in Syria, as well as in Lebanon, who send their children to Christian schools that they believe provide a more modern curriculum than either the state schools or the madrasas attached to mosques.)

Some of the Christians who lived through the fighting seem determined to remain, despite the declining size of their community. "Now I stay to support the Christian presence here," one woman told me. "I stay to support my government here." Relations between most Christians and their Muslim neighbors in Aleppo continue to be peaceful. However, the captivity of two archbishops, Syriac Orthodox Mar Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim and Greek Orthodox Boulos Yazigi, who have been held hostage by antigovernment Islamists since April 2013, deters many Christians who left from coming home.» Quelle: The New York Review of Books, In the Horrorscape of Aleppo; 25. Mai 2017: www.nybooks.com/articles/2017/05/25/syria-horrorscape-aleppo/

UN OCHA, April 2017:

«Although military actions in the city have decrease, explosive remnants of war (ERW), unexploded ordnances (UXO), improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and landmines can be considered health hazards in Aleppo, and have led several times to severe injuries and deaths. DoH statistics registered 37 war injuries and 21 war deaths in Aleppo city in March 2017. (...)

The effect of the hostilities continues to represent a threat to the protection of the civilian population in Aleppo, and particularly children. **On 23 March 2017, two separate mortar attacks in the Hamdanieh neighborhood killed five children.** In the first incident two girls (9 and 12-year-old) were reportedly hit by a mortar in the playground of the Abdulfattah Baath School, which is partially used as a temporary accommodation for IDPs. In a second incident on the same day, three siblings (a 9-year-old boy and his 7 and 9-year-old sisters) were reportedly killed by a mortar while on a street near to the school. **The Protection Sector remains concerned by the use of explosive weapons with wide impact in densely populated areas. This includes weapons such as mortars, firing to a location without a direct line of visibility to the target and often not guided to hit a specific target, making them indiscriminate.**» Quelle: UN OCHA - UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs: Syrian Arab Republic: Aleppo Situation Report No. 17 (23 April 2017), 23. April 2017: www.ecoi.net/file_upload/1788_1493044631_17.pdf.

IRIN, April 2017:

«Originally captured by rebel fighters in July 2012, the eastern half of Aleppo suffered years of shelling and air strikes. According to one Syrian expert, some 70 to 80 percent of the material destruction in Aleppo is concentrated in its eastern neighbourhoods.

After December, the former rebel enclave was virtually empty of people. Three quarters of its civilian population had been displaced into western Aleppo by the fighting, and the remaining quarter was controversially bussed out alongside opposition fighters to the rebel-held countryside west of the city.

Now the eastern half of the city is slowly being repopulated as returnees trickle back, despite extraordinary destruction, dire economic conditions, and an apparent lack of security. While outside observers tend to view the events in eastern Aleppo solely through a political lens, informed by the terrifying violence that led to the fall of the rebel enclave, many of those returning seem to be adapting pragmatically to their difficult circumstances, struggling to make life work under Bashar al-Assad just as they did under his enemies.

Rival narratives

The circumstances of the fall of the opposition enclave remain disputed. The governments of Syria, Russia, and Iran all flatly deny the brutal nature of their re-conquest of eastern Aleppo, but rather than welcoming an investigation of what happened, Syrian authorities have continued to prevent independent access to the city by journalists and human rights researchers. (...)

If that number seems surprisingly low considering the intensity of the preceding battle, it may be because those most involved with the uprising were already gone when the government took control – they had been bussed out among the 36,000 who left for the rebel-controlled countryside following a deal between the opposition and the government on 13 December.

The 13 December agreement prevented a final battle in overcrowded residential neighbourhoods, reduced the number of people at risk of retribution from al-Assad's government, and limited subsequent friction with the authorities in Aleppo, although those 36,000 are now trapped in another conflict zone. Yet it remains deeply controversial. The UN's Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic has declared that the agreement amounted to the war crime of forced displacement, saying civilians were never given a choice over whether to stay or to leave. But perversely, it also seems to have prevented a much bloodier outcome.

Arrests, looting, and corruption

Since December, the situation for civilians inside Aleppo is difficult to discern, with the facts scrambled and distorted by propaganda from both sides.

So far, al-Assad's repressive rule appears to be re-establishing itself without any major flare-ups or mass killings. A senior military source in Aleppo told IRIN in December that although those guilty of "severe criminality" would be tried and judged, "the state is open to these people returning to their normal lives."

Little is known about the treatment of civilians since then. The director of the opposition-friendly Syrian Network for Human Rights, Fadel Abdul-Ghany, told IRIN that his organisation is aware of 891 arrests of civilians after the regime reconquest, but he added that most were men between 19 and 40 who were wanted for compulsory military service rather than for political reasons.

However, Abdul-Ghany said the government has continued its “systematic policy in arresting civilians and looting their properties under the pretext of dealing with armed opposition factions,” while noting the “extraordinary challenges and difficulties” in collecting information on government abuses». Quelle: Integrated Regional Information Network, Eastern Aleppo under al-Assad, 12. April 2017: www.irinnews.org/analysis/2017/04/12/eastern-aleppo-under-al-assad.

The Guardian, 28. März 2017:

«People living in the west are not without their problems, of course – **water and electricity have to be purchased, and as the Syrian pound is at a fraction of its pre-war value, they can easily eat up a third of a salary.**» Quelle: The Guardian, 'Everything we built for 20 years, gone in a blink' – life in the ruins of Aleppo, 28. März 2017: www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/28/life-ruins-aleppo-rebel-syria-bombing-russia

Syrischer Journalist, 27. Juni 2017:

«After regime forces backed by Iranian and Iraqi militias took over the whole city 8 months ago **the security situation in the city became worse than before.** It is true that there are no more shells or bombings but **random shooting, abduction, arrests, intimidation cases became incredibly more.** In social media and other websites - some of these websites are even pro-regime- and depending on many friends who are still living in Aleppo there are **many stories about random arrests carried out by different security apparatuses, robbery, chaos, rape cases, seizing properties and abduction stories that usually end by paying huge amount of money.** According to the same resources, local Shabiha (irregular fighters loyal to regime) along with Iraqi Shia militias are behind most of these cases. Many confirmed sad stories went viral in Syrian social media like shooting a 10 year old boy (Ahmad Jawish) by an armed man in the Mocambo neighborhood because the poor boy asked the man to give him some money!! Another Syrian- Armenian doctor- a mother of two children- was hit by an unknown car that belong to Shabiha. People of Aleppo started complaining about these acts in a low voice and regime authorities promised to carry out some tough measures but almost nothing happened.

As for electricity people still depend on their money to buy electricity from generators owned by regime Shabiha, this has been the situation in Aleppo for more than 4 years, electricity comes for one hour only and sometimes it is off for many days. This adds to high costs of life amid soaring prices of food and medicine which lack any quality control or hygiene. The same applies for water. The city was thirsty for months because it depends mainly on water coming from the Euphrates and other smaller lakes which were under ISIS control. According to many friends

the situation concerning water became a little bit better but people still need to buy water from private water tanks.» Quelle: E-Mail-Auskunft eines syrischen Journalisten, 27. Juni 2017.

Syrischer Journalist, 28. Juni 2017:

*«The security situation is very fragile and **police forces are helpless and sometimes involved in human right abuses, abduction, bribery, rape and theft. The dominant groups are pro-regime Shabiha which are behind all crimes in both eastern and western Aleppo.***

Prices of food, basic services like water and electricity are very high, an average life cost for one person in Aleppo is between 100 to 200 USD and this depends on his or her life style, health conditions. Meat and chicken prices are very high in comparison to average people with normal income. Each family of four members need at least 300 USD to survive. One USD makes 520 Syrian Pound. The average of wages are 80 to 100 for those working for the government.

Health facilities, hospitals and other medical institutions have been greatly affected by the war and lack of electricity and clean water. Hygiene is in its lowest level, medicine is being manufactured without any quality control and taking Syrian-made medicine has so far caused a lot of complications for many people since no experts are controlling the process. Medicine factories have also been greatly vandalized and damaged. Very few people can afford going to private clinics and many doctors have left the city and the whole country since the start of the war.» Quelle: E-Mail-Auskunft eines syrischen Journalisten, 28. Juni 2017.

IKRK, Juni 2017:

«The Syrian city of Aleppo was a centre of learning, music and trade for more than a thousand years, and the heart of the country's economy before the war. Now its historic centre is largely destroyed, its population reduced and its intellectual, cultural and economic life in ruins.» S.11

*Once Syria's largest city, with a population of 2.1 million people, Aleppo is known as one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. (...) But more than four years of intense conflict changed all that. **Aleppo's densely packed neighbourhoods became the theatre of sustained, systematic bombardment from both air-to-ground munitions and ground launched artillery shells – all of which caused massive destruction and thousands of casualties. Ultimately, no area of the city was spared the violence.** Yasser's neighbourhood was one of several that were nearly completely destroyed. Today, most apartment buildings, schools, businesses and shops are bombed-out shells, and the once-bustling streets are almost-empty pathways that wind through scattered piles of rubble.»* S. 20

*«Yasser's story is one that has played out many thousands of times over the last four years, in various parts of Aleppo. **While the city was divided between east (controlled by armed opposition groups) and west (under government control), from July 2012 to December 2016, there was intense and almost daily fighting, with massive use of heavy explosive weapons in populated areas. During the course of***

the conflict, images of the children of Aleppo increasingly shocked the world: their bloodied faces, seen in videos with bewildered, stunned or traumatized expressions, or lifeless in the arms of rescuers as their bodies were pulled from the rubble. As the violence escalated, humanitarians and essential service providers struggled to respond to people's dramatically increasing needs, especially given that humanitarian access was very limited in certain areas. They described the situation in ever more urgent terms.

HUMANITY UNDER FIRE

*As attacks affecting health-care and humanitarian workers increased in frequency in conflicts around the world, the battle for Aleppo became emblematic of the dangers health-care workers face during urban conflict. The ICRC and other humanitarian organizations repeatedly raised the alarm over the worsening humanitarian situation. **Essential infrastructure such as hospitals, water-supply and electrical networks, and schools continued to come under fire in Aleppo and other urban areas.** In 2015 and 2016, a succession of attacks against hospitals and health-care facilities killed doctors and patients, and denied thousands desperately needed health care. (...)*

RETURNING HOME

*Even though some already speak of "post-conflict Aleppo", fighting continues in the nearby countryside. Before there can be talk of recovery, the significant and urgent humanitarian needs in the city must be addressed. An estimated 140,000 people have returned to their homes since the urban violence ended. Thousands more cannot yet return, in part because of the extensive damage to their homes. This remains true in other cities where the violence subsided earlier, such as Homs. What is crucial is that all displaced civilians – from Aleppo and other areas – be allowed and helped to return to their areas of origin and homes, safely, if and when they choose.¹¹ See *Compounding effects: Displaced people in urban areas*, page 46. **Despite having been divided for several years, Aleppo was always interdependent, and people moved between areas so long as this remained possible. Families had relatives in different areas, and many fled to other neighbourhoods at the height of the violence or left the city completely. The sense of trauma and loss is collective, the extent of the destruction is vast, and there are still significant dangers posed by unexploded ordnance and other remnants of war. "Aleppo was heaven, we had everything. And then, in a moment, we had nothing. I never ever thought to leave. However, I don't blame people who did: they had no choice. Aleppo used to be a safe city. Suddenly it turned from a peaceful place into an extremely dangerous one. I would say that at least 40 per cent of the people left this neighbourhood."** (...)*

Aleppo, scene of one of the worst urban battles in recent history, attracted thousands of Syrians from nearby places.» Quelle: IKRK, I Saw my City Die, voices from the Front Lines of Urban Conflicts, 13. Juni 2017, S. 22, 46: <http://cityatwar.icrc.org/>.