

STATE AND LOCAL

Massive Death Toll in Ongoing Syria Conflict

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Rebel forces in Aleppo.
photo via bbc.co.uk

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an activist group from the UK, assessed that over 6,000 people were killed in the Syria conflict in March -- the highest monthly death toll the ongoing two-year conflict has yet produced. Rami Abdel Rahman, the head of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said that a recent escalation in fighting is contributing to the higher numbers in deaths, more than 500 of

because of the conflict, which started in March 2011, there have been more than 70,000 deaths in Syria and over 1 million Syrian refugees. The Violation Documentation Center in Syria has recorded the deaths of 8,785 soldiers. The government stopped reporting the deaths of its own troops as the civil war developed, and it is speculated that lower numbers have been supplied by both sides of the conflict as a



Boy walks bike through wreckage in Damascus.
photo via nytimes.com

which were women and children this month, while fewer than 3,000 of the death toll were soldiers.

The United Nations estimates that

strategy to keep spirits high.

In March 2011, as a result of several young people being arrested for writing revolutionary ideas on school

property, mass protests broke out in Deraa. The tensions escalated when many protestors were shot by government forces. In May and July, tensions continued to rise when the government used tanks to silence protesters in Deraa, Homs, and Damascus, but triggered more mass protests.

The Opposition Syrian National Council was formed in October. Over a year later, in November 2012, the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition forces was formed. The coalition was acknowledged by the United States in December.

Factions among the oppositional forces are becoming more apparent as Jabhat al-Nursa, or the al-Nursa Front, an extremist group that has pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda, has started claiming the usage of car bombs. Other oppositional forces strongly denounce

Analysts say that should the conflict continue, it could seriously threaten the stability of their neighboring countries. There is worry that fighting will spread to Lebanon, Turkey and Israel, the countries that share borders with Syria. This fear was heightened when the village of al-Qasr, located on the Lebanese border, was attacked by two missiles fired from Syria on April 7. The Sunday attack resulted in three casualties and is coupled with a series of other skirmishes between the regime and rebel forces close to the Lebanese border.

Western countries, such as the United States and France, are leaning towards supporting the opposition forces, but have not yet decided to supply weapons. At an international meeting of diplomats, on February



Buildings destroyed by Syrian Air Force fighter jet in Binsh
photo via nytimes.com

the use of bombs in highly populated areas, such as Damascus. The al-Nursa Front also aims for an Islamist state, an ambition that oppositional forces like the Free Syrian Army do not share. The Free Syrian Army has denounced al-Nursa and refuses to ever cooperate with them.

Meanwhile, the government continues to claim that it is fighting al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups. The regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has been widely criticized by international groups for its bombing and other violent assaults on civilians. On Sunday, the Syrian government ordered an airstrike on an opposition affiliated neighborhood in Damascus, killing at least 25 civilians.

28, the UK Foreign Secretary William Hague promised more aid to the Syria opposition, but still withheld weaponry. The United States has been steadily increasing the amount of aid given and announced on Wednesday that Obama has agreed to provide funding for certain military branches of the opposition to obtain battlefield equipment such as body armor and night vision goggles. Secretary of State John Kerry along with many other foreign diplomats are planning to meet in Istanbul on April 20 to further discuss the amount of support they are willing to provide Syrian rebel forces.

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