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SIEGE WARFARE

**SPECIAL EDITION: THE IMPLICATIONS FOR
CIVILIAN POPULATIONS OF THE
RESURGENCE OF SIEGE WARFARE**

BY HUGO MCCULLAGH



CEASEFIRE
centre for civilian rights



Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights empowers civilians in war zones to monitor and document violations of international humanitarian law and human rights. This month's newsletter focuses on Ceasefire's latest report, presenting recommendations for how the global reemergence of siege warfare requires urgent action to prevent mass harm of civilians.

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Protecting civilians in siege warfare: Constraints on military action

Stuart Casey-Maslen

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OUR LATEST REPORT: PROTECTING CIVILIANS IN SIEGE WARFARE

Ceasefire has just released our newest report, *Protecting Civilians in Siege Warfare: Constraints on Military Action*. The report is authored by Professor Stuart Casey-Maslen of the University of Pretoria. The report deals with how states, alliances and international law should respond to the rising prevalence of siege tactics in modern warfare.

As the report highlights, siege warfare is intrinsically a civilian rights issue. Three in depth case studies are carried out of siege warfare since the end of the Cold War; Sarajevo (1992-96), Aleppo (2012-2016), and Mosul (2016-17). In each case, the civilian death-toll was extremely high, with appalling suffering endured by those who survived the sieges. However, dealing with siege warfare is complex under international law. Although siege tactics in warfare are not necessarily illegal in themselves, they do become illegal in terms of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) when attacks are indiscriminate or feasible precautions are not taken to avoid or minimise harm to the civilian population. However, as the report details, the sieges led to mass civilian harm from prolonged deprivation and use of explosive weapons.



A critical implication of the research is that urgent action is required by governments, including the United Kingdom, and by NATO. Analysis of the siege of Mosul in 2016-2017, which was conducted by Iraqi government forces, with support from a US-led coalition including the Royal Air Force, against ISIS. During the campaign between 9,000 and 11,000 civilians are estimated to have died, with Iraqi and coalition airstrikes and artillery responsible for at least 3,200 of the civilian deaths.

This supports the report's recommendations, which include that the UK and NATO should review military doctrine and procedures regarding sieges in order to limit civilian deaths and suffering in military operations.

To read the full report, follow the link below:

<https://www.ceasefire.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Protecting-civilians-in-siege-warfare-CEASEFIRE.pdf>

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**Protecting civilians in
siege warfare:
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THE IMPLICATIONS OF SIEGE WARFARE ON THE WAR IN UKRAINE

As siege warfare has been used extensively by Russian forces in Ukraine, Ceasefire's report naturally focuses in part on the Russian siege of Mariupol. Mariupol is a Ukrainian city on the Sea of Azov in South-Eastern Ukraine's Donbas region.

The first reports of the Siege of Mariupol came in early March and Russia has since then surrounded the city from all three sides. A month later, Mariupol is still under siege and has been without water, electricity, or sanitary systems for over a month.

A clear trait of the Russian siege style is that it cares very little for civilian harm. Mariupol's deputy mayor reported that Russian forces had targeted civilian locations and multiple reports have been made of strikes on schools and hospitals. Reports have also been made of the use of indiscriminate artillery fire and the use of cluster weapons in residential areas, both of which violate International Humanitarian Law. A humanitarian corridor out of Mariupol was established but has since been non-operational due to Russian shelling.

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Mariupol remains under siege and represents a clear indication of the prevalence of siege tactics in modern warfare, as well as the devastation they cause to civilian populations. Ukraine's deputy mayor said of the siege that, "Today Putin's style of war is like Aleppo", referring to the destruction of Syria's second city..

INTERVIEW WITH OUR PARTNERS IN LEBANON: THE ADYAN FOUNDATION

Earlier this month I was delighted to be able to interview Adriana Bou Diwan of the Adyan Foundation, one of Ceasefire's partner organisations in Lebanon. Adriana is the Head of Adyan's Community Engagement Department and was able to share some of her insights as to the fantastic work she and her team do to counter sectarian tension among the Lebanese youth.

'WE HAVE BEEN FACING A MULTIDIMENSIONAL CRISIS, INCLUDING A MAJOR ECONOMIC CRISIS DUE TO THE DEPRECIATION OF THE LEBANESE POUND, AS WELL AS A SHORTAGE OF FUEL, ELECTRICITY AND MEDICINE.'

Q: The Lebanese crisis was covered a lot in the UK at the time of the Beirut dock explosion, but since then how has the crisis developed and how has it affected Adyan's work?

A: The situation in Lebanon has made circumstances very difficult. We have been facing a multidimensional crisis, including a major economic crisis due to the depreciation of the Lebanese Pound, as well as a shortage of fuel, electricity and medicine. This has led to a far higher need for support in our society, which Adyan's humanitarian branch has been working hard to deal with. Unfortunately, such crises tend to lead to higher sectarian tensions.

Q: If it would be possible, could you explain more about Adyan's work countering sectarian hate? Are there particular groups or parts of Lebanese society which are particularly afflicted?

A: Actually, sectarian tension in Lebanon is not isolated to specific groups or parts of society. However, it's really all over the country. Particularly now with the Lebanese parliamentary elections coming up in May, a lot of political parties and leaders are using the sectarian aspect to influence certain voters. So it isn't really isolated to a group or area, it's more that different areas have different sects which are prone to tensions arising.

Q: I was just going to ask what you think it is that provokes sectarian tensions in Lebanon specifically?

A: I would say that the diversity we have in Lebanon is an incredibly positive part of Lebanese society, but that unfortunately the presence of such diversity is being used as a political tool for political benefit. So, I would say this is one of the main reasons as to why we have sectarianism. Secondly, after the Lebanese Civil War finished in 1990, we did not have a real transitional justice mechanism and the memory to some degree hasn't healed yet. The collective memory is

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still wounded from the war and some people do not feel receive justice. To make matters worse, a lot of the political leaders who were prominent during the war are still politically active now.

Q: Thanks Adriana that's an incredibly insightful answer. So within this frame of much sectarian tension, how do Adyan contribute to lowering sectarianism?

A: Adyan contribute through our different departments to both directly and indirectly target sectarianism. We do this through different age groups and regions. For example, we have a long ongoing programme in schools all over Lebanon called 'Al-Alwan', the Arabic for 'colours'. This programme really aims at providing sessions for students on living together, on citizenship, and coexistence. Of course, we have other programmes and other projects which also focus on freedom of religion and beliefs, both in Lebanon and abroad. We also have a political aspect of our work which is working with youth parliaments, where we carry out mock youth elections based on non-sectarian electoral law. This came up with 64 Members of Parliament for the Youth, who work on coming up with laws which are non-sectarian. These are just some examples of a few of our projects, we also have a wide network of volunteers who run awareness sessions. We also have our project with Ceasefire which mainly works on our Forum for Religious Social Responsibility, which launched in 2008. This forum is made up of more than 100 religious leaders and religious activists who work together to promote a non-sectarian narrative to campaign against hate speech and to act as a buffer against extremism in different areas of Lebanon.

To donate to our wonderful partners at Adyan please find the link to their donations page below:

<https://adyanfoundation.org/donate-for-solidarity-in-action/>

To see more of Adyan's work, please find their latest summary report on their work attached below:

<https://adyanfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Adyan-GlobalReport-En.pdf>