



Appointing War Criminals to Lead the "Syrian Army" Undermines Justice and Insults Victims

Synergy Association for Victims warns against the legitimization of violations and calls for the accountability of armed faction leaders who are internationally designated on sanction lists

Synergy Association for Victims strongly condemned the recent military appointments made by the Syrian transitional government within the ranks of the newly formed "Syrian National Army." The appointments include individuals listed on international sanctions lists and accused of committing serious human rights violations that may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The Association described these appointments as "a profound setback to the course of transitional justice in Syria and a re-legitimization of crimes under the guise of the state and military institutions," warning against the reproduction of the former repressive structures under new leadership.

Abu Hatem Shaqra Appointed to Official Leader Despite His Violent Record:

One of the most notable [appointments](#) is the assignment of **Ahmad Ihsan Fayyad al-Hayes**, known as "**Abu Hatem Shaqra**," as a commander of the 86th Military Division with the rank of a Brigadier General in the eastern region. Shaqra is the former leader of "Tajamou Ahrar al-Sharqiya", which is an armed group known for its rife record of serious violations. Both the group and Shaqra himself

were previously sanctioned by the U.S. Department of the Treasury under Executive Order 13894 for their direct involvement in "serious human rights violations in Syria".¹

According to a [statement issued by the US Treasury Department](#) on July 28, 2021, "Ahrar al-Sharqiya" group led by Abu Hatem Shaqra, was involved in the unlawful killing of the Kurdish politician **Hevrin Khalaf**, the Secretary General of the Future Syria Party, along with her two escorts and driver. The crime was documented by the United Nations and was described by the UN Human Rights Office as amounting to a "war crime."

The group has also been responsible for a series of widespread violations, including:

- The killing of civilians, including healthcare workers.
- Systematic abductions and torture of local residents.
- Preventing internally displaced persons (IDPs) from returning to their homes and areas of origin.
- Operating secret prisons outside Aleppo, where hundreds have been executed since 2018.
- Carrying out organized extortion and ransom campaigns targeting businesspeople and opposition figures.
- Involvement in the trafficking of Yazidi women and children and integrating former ISIS members into the ranks of Ahrar al-Sharqiya.

According to US reports, Abu Hatem Shaqra personally oversaw the Ahrar al-Sharqiya prison. He is also believed to have made direct deals with ISIS members, who later pledged allegiance to him and operated within his group.

Abu Amsha and Abu Bakr at the Helm of Military Formations

The appointment of Abu Hatim Shaqra is not an isolated case. The recent wave of appointments includes several commanders of armed factions who are implicated in serious violations and war crimes, and who have been designated under U.S. sanctions. Among the most prominent are:

- **Mohammad al-Jasim (Abu Amsha):**

The former leader of "Sultan Suleiman Shah Brigade", known as "al-Amshat", was [appointed](#) as a leader of the 62th Division in Hama with the rank of a Brigadier General.

On August 17, 2023, the US Treasury Department [designated](#) Abu Amsha, along with his brother, for his direct involvement in committing gross human rights violations in Syria. These include the forced displacement of Kurdish residents from Afrin, the seizure of their properties, and the redistribution of vacated homes to individuals—often relatives of fighters in his brigade—from outside the region. He is also accused of abducting civilians and

¹ U.S. Department of the Treasury, Treasury Sanctions Syrian Regime Prisons, Officials, and Syrian Armed Group, 28 July 2021 (Available at: <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0292>)

demanding ransom for their release, generating tens of millions of dollars annually through extortion and ransom schemes. Furthermore, Abu Amsha allegedly raped the wife of one of his brigade members and threatened her and her family with harm should she speak out, according to the official statement by the US Treasury Department.²

- **Sayf Boulad (Abu Bakr):**

Commander of al-Hamza Division, Sayf Boulad—also known as Abu Bakr—was [assigned](#) as a leader of the 76th Division in Aleppo with the rank of a Brigadier General. On August 17, 2023, the U.S. Department of the Treasury [sanctioned](#) both al-Hamza Division and its leader for their involvement in the abduction of Kurdish women, who were held for extended periods, as well as the brutal torture of detainees, some of whom died as a result. The division is also reported to operate detention centers where sexual violence is committed against victims, many of whom are women and often detained as hostages.³

Undermining the Path of Justice and Legitimizing Impunity

Synergy Association for Victims believes that the appointment of figures accused of committing gross human rights violations to senior military positions is a serious threat to the course of transitional justice. These appointments serve to reproduce the same repressive security structures that once contributed to the fragmentation of Syrian society—this time under the guise of “opposition” figures who carry the same legacy of repression, corruption, and impunity.

“Appointing individuals involved in crimes of murder, torture, and rape, to official positions not only disregards the rights of victims —it also entrenches the authority of perpetrators within the new system and sets a dangerous precedent that threatens any prospects for truth, justice, and reconciliation.”

We affirm that legitimizing these leaderships severely undermines the work of victims’ association, civil society, and human rights organizations that have fought for years to document violations and crimes, pursue accountability, and open pathways to justice for victims.

A Call for Accountability and Structural Reform of the Syrian National Army

Synergy Association holds the Syrian transitional government directly responsible for the violations perpetuated by these forces that have officially integrated in the “Syrian National Army”, and calls for the immediate exclusion of all individuals implicated in such crimes from positions of power and authority.

² U.S. Department of the Treasury, Treasury Sanctions Two Syria-Based Militias Responsible for Serious Human Rights Abuses in Northern Syria, 17 August 2023 (Available at: <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy1699>).

³ Ibid.

The Syrian transitional government must urgently prioritize the unification of its army under a single, accountable leadership. Appointments should be subject to clear human rights standards, including thorough vetting of commanders' records. Moreover, an independent judicial system must be established—one capable of protecting civilians and ensuring accountability for all perpetrators of violations.

In a post-conflict phase, justice is neither a political luxury nor a demand that can be postponed. It is the only guarantee for rebuilding a safe Syria—one that is free from repression and grounded in human dignity and the rule of law.

There can be no genuine peace while perpetrators of war crimes remain in power and are recycled as future leaders. True healing for the people comes through accountability and justice—not through silence.

The [U.S. Embassy's Facebook page in Syria](#) quoted a statement by Ambassador Dorothy Shea, the U.S. Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations, in which she said, **"We expect all perpetrators [of recent violence] to be held accountable, especially those in leadership roles or who are high profile. This will send a clear message to all Syrians that no one is above the law in the new Syria."**